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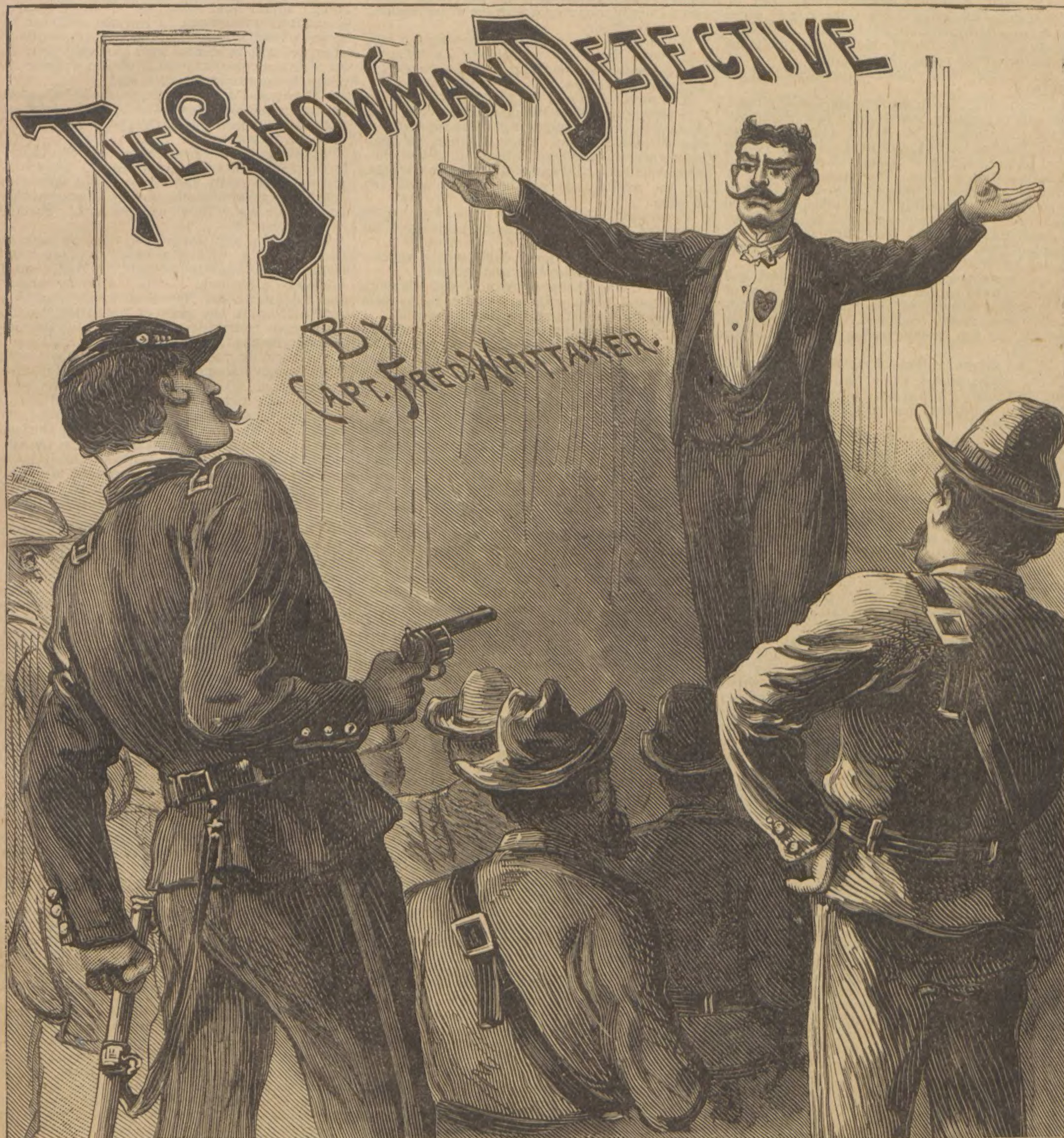
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"STAND STEADY, MAN OR DEVIL! I'LL PROVE YOUR CHARACTER A SHAM AND YOURSELF A FRAUD BEFORE I GET THROUGH WITH YOU!"

The Showman Detective;

OR,

THE MAD MAGICIAN.

BY CAPT. FRED. WHITTAKER,
AUTHOR OF "THE RED RAJAH," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE MAGICIAN.

THE hostelry of Don Jago D'Obrino was full of men in every sort of civilized and uncivilized garb, talking all sorts of languages; yet alike in one thing, that every man was armed to the teeth, and looked as if eager for a chance to use his weapons on somebody or something.

Don Jago D'Obrino, with the red hair and broad jaw of his Celtic parents, had the full dress of a Mexican cavalier—such as he had become. Originally owning the humble but useful name of Jimmy O'Brien, he had gratefully accepted the change into Spanish, which had made it Jago D'Obrino and had become a thriving and successful tavern-keeper in the border town of El Paso. He had bought a ruined hacienda for a mere song, and had transformed it into a comfortable hotel, with innumerable rooms, more or less bare of furniture, but with the indispensable attachment of a first-class bar-room. Here he dispensed "American drinks" to the thirstysouls congregated at the border, in the days immediately after the surrender of General Lee at Appomattox Court-house, when men from both the disbanded armies flocked to the Southwest, to help the Mexican Republicans to throw off the yoke of Maximilian.

An exciting and romantic time was that, at El Paso.

For the first time in many years, the Mexicans, instead of casting scowls at "Los Yanquis," with the memories of Santa Anna to incite hatred and revenge, fraternized with everything that talked English, if it carried revolvers and sixteen-shooting rifles. Gorgeous brigands, in velvet, with gold buttons, were on the best of terms with men in dirty gray, and equally dirty blue, who were being organized into bands of "Juaristas," to carry blood and fire into the camp of the "accursed usurper," as every one called Maximilian.

Ten companies had already been formed and ten more were talked of, while the question of who should command the "American Regiment" was freely discussed, over all sorts of drinks, at the inexhaustible bar of Señor D'Obrino.

It took several gallons of whisky to settle who should be the colonel, while the rest of the field and staff made El Paso drunk, from the alcalde down to the beggars, before they could get the matter settled.

The voting was of that thoroughly fraternal kind which prevailed among the soldiers who fought on both sides of the American Civil War, immediately after its close. The question of whether the colonel should be a man who wore blue or gray had been decided by a toss-up, after a prolonged drunk, in favor of the man in gray, for the reason that he "had to fight against odds all through the war."

The particular man chosen was a short, heavily-built fellow, with a bull-dog face, who was noted as a skillful fighter, on foot or horseback, and who had served in the Texan Rangers, under Kirby Smith, up to the last surrender. His name was Brooke, and it was said that he was one of those men from the North, who had been, at the beginning of the war, caught by the glamour of the Southern Confederacy, to which he had afterward clung, because he was too proud to confess that he had been mistaken.

Such as he was, George Brooke had the name of being a pleasant fellow, though some said he was "not to be trusted in a tight place," whatever that meant in their slang.

The lieutenant-colonel and major were ex-Federal soldiers; the first a Massachusetts man, called Davol; the other a New York German, who rejoiced in the name of Hardenkopf.

The staff of the new regiment comprised a "Johnny" for an adjutant, a "Yank" for quartermaster, and the other positions were equally divided, so that no jealousy might be felt.

Then, in the absence of marching orders from Juarist head-quarters, time began to hang heavily on the hands of the newly enrolled men; and in this state of affairs general excitement was caused by the appearance of some huge posters, printed in Spanish and English, with gorgeous cuts, announcing that "The Renowned Doctor Satan, the Mad Magician of Mystery and Mind-Reading, Emperor of the Land Beyond the Veil" was coming to El Paso, to perform various wonderful tricks represented on the bills by pictures.

The idea was a welcome one to most of the idle soldiers in town, who had plenty of money, such as it was, and nothing to buy but drinks. They hailed the opportunity of getting rid of some of it and passing an evening not altogether dull by the aid of Doctor Satan, the more so that he was to hold his exhibition in the "pa-

tio," or inner court of the posada of Don D'Obrino, near the bar.

Here, on the evening when our story opens, the greater part of the "American Regiment" was gathered, with the field and staff in the front seats, staring at a curtain which Doctor Satan had hung up before his stage to conceal the mechanism.

Considering that the audience was a rough one, it was remarkably patient and good-natured. True, Sergeant Cassidy, of Co. A, who had come to the show, fresh from the bar, began to practice with his revolver at the chandelier, just as the pianist came in to play the overture, but Colonel Brooke stopped his exuberance with the simple remark from the front seats:

"Boys, this won't do. There are ladies present, and we must pay for that chandelier, if it gets broken."

Whereupon the frolicsome sergeant was lifted bodily and taken off by four stout fellows, and the pianist, a little, slender German, with long, fair hair and mild-blue eyes, sat down and dashed off a brilliant fantasia with a skill that brought forth a round of clappings from all present, while Corporal Casey shouted from the back:

"Bedad! the little divil has the 'lickstricity in his fingers, so he has, now. Play us 'Drops of Brandy,' darlin'."

But the little pianist, who seemed to be as cool as a marble statue, in spite of the shooting, merely smiled and pointed to the curtain which at that moment slowly rose, disclosing a handsomely-furnished room, with the usual stands and tables littered round it in the style familiar to magic shows.

He began to play a weird air in a minor key, and Doctor Satan entered softly as a cat, rubbing his hands and smiling as he surveyed the audience before him.

And then, in spite of the fact that the men before him were used to strange sights, a low buzz of surprise and something very like superstition ran through the men of the "American Regiment" and the Mexican damsels that had clustered round the field and staff in the front seats, for the appearance of the doctor was very strange.

The reason of his name was plain: he exactly resembled the traditional representations of the Evil One.

Not a coarse medieval devil, but a refined modern fiend, in dress-coat and so forth.

His face was of marble pallor, and his dark eyes blazed forth with a peculiar luster that daunted the boldest man present for a while.

He wore a mustache and imperial, twisted to points that went up at either corner of his mouth, with the peculiar sneering smile of the traditional demon of romance. His black, curly hair was arranged to conceal anything like horns at either side of his forehead.

His hands were cased in black gloves, and the illusion was further carried out by the fact that as he opened his mouth to make his prelude a little flame and smoke curled above his head, till he hastily passed his hand over his mouth and stifled it to all seeming. But when he spoke his voice was soft and musical in the extreme, as he said:

"Ladies and gentlemen, it is not often that I come out before an audience, as you know. The cold world is too cold for me as a rule; but I have made an exception in your favor. The weather in this part of the world is almost warm enough for me; and you, gentlemen, are used to giving your enemies—ahem—you know what I mean—so that I feel, as it were, at home among you, as I never felt before. I hope to see most of you again, when I am at home, you know; and I feel sure that you will not disappoint me long. I shall keep good fires for you all, of course, and—"

Here he was interrupted by a ripple of laughter that began to spread through the court as the sharp Americans began to catch the joke, and take it good-humoredly. The magician smiled and went on in the same quiet tones:

"I see you understand me. We are old friends. I will waste no more time on that, but begin at once. I am in search of recruits for my—well, call it my Home Guard. Captain Beelzebub tells me that he needs some real hard fighters, warranted not to shirk fire, and the first request I have to make is this: is there among you a gentleman who is willing to have his head cut off for the good of the rest, so that he may bring them a message from the other world, where I reign alone? Come, gentlemen, I am talking to soldiers who are not afraid of death or the—well, of me. Who dares have his head cut off?"

As he paused, rubbing his hands and looking round with his peculiar smile, a deep silence pervaded the court. The hardened soldiers had come expecting a common card-trickster, and had experienced a shock that fairly unnerved them.

Before they could recover from this the magician went on in the same serene way:

"Perhaps you do not think I can do it? Well, I will show you that the—that I make no boasts I cannot back up. I can suspend the laws of gravity and hang a solid body of flesh and blood in the air before your eyes. You shall see

me do it for my first feat. I do not say *trick*, for I scorn the word."

Then he softly clapped his gloved hands together, and at the signal a boy dressed as a page, with long, curling brown hair falling over his shoulders, came tripping in from the wings and stood beside Doctor Satan. The silence that pervaded the court was broken at the entrance of the boy by a stifled exclamation that came from the front benches:

"My God!"

The officers stirred in their seats and looked curiously round at their new colonel, who had uttered the cry, and whose face, usually brown and ruddy, had turned of a gray pallor that showed strong emotion of some kind as he stared at the boy.

His dark eyes were dilated, and he trembled violently, while great drops of sweat stood on his forehead.

CHAPTER II.

THE BLEEDING HEAD.

THE evident emotion of the American colonel did not escape notice; the more so that he occupied the most conspicuous position in the court. The officers moved over toward him, asking, in whispers, "what was the matter?" and Doctor Satan himself suspended proceedings for an instant to say, in his sweet tones:

"There is no occasion for alarm, gentlemen. The experiments are entirely harmless, being executed in consequence of my power over the kingdom of nature, by which I can do the most impossible things. For instance, I can make things appear and disappear, at my pleasure, vanishing into thin air. I beg the audience to compose itself for it will need all its strength of mind before I have done with the exhibition. Is there any one present who doubts my power to make things vanish into thin air?"

"Begorra, I'd like to see ye do it," shouted the irrepressible Corporal Casey, at the back of the court. "Seein's believin', ye know."

Doctor Satan smiled.

"I recognize the familiar accent of old Ireland. I love the Irish people dearly. They supply me with many recruits. I will show the gentleman what he desires before I hang up this boy in the air without any support. Pardon me a moment."

He made a sign to the boy, who fell back to the front of a table, while the magician went to the wings and returned instantly with a small bird-cage in his hand, in which a pretty canary was hopping about. The moment he brought it to the front, in the glare of the footlights, the bird began to warble melodiously, and the magician remarked, with his customary smile:

"You think you see this bird; do you not? You perceive that it is in a cage and is alive and singing. You doubt my power to make it vanish, cage and all. Well, then, behold!"

He had been walking to and fro, showing the bird all the time, and as he pronounced the last words he extended his arms suddenly in the air, when, amid a buzz of astonishment through the audience, the bird vanished, cage and all! The magician, with the same smile and bow, turned away and went to the wings once more, remarking:

"Now I will get my magic wand, with which I perform my greatest feats of mystery."

While he was gone, the soldiers in the audience, most of them countrymen, who believed implicitly in the power of the Evil One, began to talk to each other in low tones; while the Mexicans present, who were still more superstitious and ignorant, crossed themselves devoutly, and muttered prayers to all the saints in the calendar.

In the mean time Colonel Brooke, who seemed to be ashamed of the emotion he had exhibited at the appearance of the boy on the stage, sat, wiping his forehead and glancing uneasily round him, while he affected to laugh at the tricks of Doctor Satan, whom he called "a shallow charlatan, a mere mountebank, you know."

But even he admitted that the trick just performed had been one he could not explain.

Before he could state his position clearly, the magician came back with a naked sword gleaming in his hand, which he waved in the air in a graceful salute, as if he were master of the weapon, as he said:

"Behold, gentlemen, the magic wand with which I work my wonders. You, as soldiers, will be able to appreciate it, for it has brought more recruits to my kingdom than anything else in the world. With this weapon I can transform that boy, who stands there, into a dead body, and change the body into a spirit, which will dissolve into thin air. Does any one doubt my power?"

He looked round him, with the strange smile that made the points of his mustache go to his eyes; and as nobody answered, he proceeded:

"But before I do this, I will show you my absolute power over my victim. Albert, are you ready to die?"

He addressed the pretty boy, who immediately turned pale, and with a look of extreme terror, faltered:

"No, good master. No. Slay me not, I beseech thee!"

Doctor Satan waved his sword in the air over

the boy's head, and an immediate change came over the child. His eyes closed and his body became rigid and immovable, while a vacant look stole over his countenance.

"Albert, art thou ready to die?" asked Doctor Satan again.

In a stiff, mechanical way, the boy answered, monotonously:

"Yes—yes—yes!"

Doctor Satan placed the point of the sword on the head of the boy, and waved his other hand in a secret sign. Albert instantly turned, walking in a stiff, mechanical way, and went to a stool which stood at the back of the stage, on which he mounted slowly, the pianist playing soft music the while. On the stool he turned and faced the audience, when they saw that his eyes were shut and that he seemed to be sleeping.

The magician retired a pace or two, and remarked to the soldiers, with his sneering smile:

"I am about to do something that would frighten most people, but you, as soldiers, are used to the sight of blood. I am going to stab that boy to the heart. Now!"

With the word he suddenly lunged out with the sword, in the attitude of a fencer, and stabbed the boy, before their eyes, right over the heart, whence the blood spurted out all over the stage.

This time the buzz of surprise was changed into a low sigh of horror and amazement, as the boy, with a sudden change of face, gave a faint shriek. Then his head dropped on one side, and he stood there on the stool, to all seeming, stone-dead.

Doctor Satan, with his white face and black, horn-like hair, turned round and showed a spot of blood on his own forehead, saying:

"My subjects obey me to the last, you see. The boy is dead, and my power has prevented him from falling from that stool. I shall now cut him to pieces and make the pieces disappear before your eyes till he has become a disembodied spirit. Behold!"

He walked up to the stool and deliberately cut off the right arm of the boy, which he cast on the stage. As it fell, he stamped on the ground and the arm disappeared.

With the same weapon he cut off all the limbs of the boy in succession, the pieces disappearing as he stamped on the stage, till nothing remained but the trunk and the head, which seemed to be suspended in the air against a background of dark curtains.

Then Doctor Satan came to the front of the stage holding in his hand the sword which was dripping with blood, the spectacle of his gory hands and weapon appalling the oldest soldier there; and said, in a deep, solemn voice:

"I am about to decapitate my victim, and to reanimate the head, while my servants take the body where it belongs. Behold!"

He wheeled round, amid a silence that now became painful, while the Mexicans were staring at each other, pale and scared; and even the practical Americans looked a little uneasy. The way in which this singular magician performed his tricks, made them, in such a place and among such an audience, doubly impressive.

Walking to the suspended body he deliberately cut off the head and held it up in one hand, dripping with blood from the neck, while two men, who had been concealed in the wings, suddenly sprang forward, attired as demons and vomiting flames from their mouths, to snatch up the body from where it still hung, and leap back as silently as they had come. When they had disappeared, there stood Doctor Satan, with the head of the poor boy in his hand, the fixed stare of an agonized death still on the features as the magician slowly said:

"He is dead—dead—dead! No human power can bring him from his grave. Only mine can work the wonder. Can the dead speak? None but I can make them. Behold!"

He walked slowly across the stage, and placed the head on a tall pedestal, that stood in the center. It was composed of three thin legs of wrought iron, less than half an inch in diameter, and under the legs burned a brazen lamp, made in the likeness of a coiled dragon, vomiting flames from its jaws.

Doctor Satan placed the head on the table, with his back to the audience, and waved his sword over it thrice, pronouncing some words, in a strange tongue, in a loud voice. Then he came to the front of the stage and said aloud:

"Head of Albert, if thou art dead, be silent. If thou livest, through me, speak. Dost thou live or no?"

The eyes of the soldiers were riveted on the head placed on the tripod, and several men in the rear of the court had drawn their revolvers, muttering to each other all sorts of threats against the magician, as a professor of the black art, and a murderer.

Then, to their astonishment, the eyes of the head were seen to open and turn on Doctor Satan, while the mouth moved and said:

"I live, through thee!"

This time the hush of suspense, that had held even the officers spellbound, was broken by a shout from Davol, of "Bravo! bravo!" which was followed by a thunder of applause that shook the walls of the old hacienda.

The magician, as imperturbable as before, did not deign to notice the applause, but continued in the same loud tones:

"Where hast thou been?"

"In the other world," replied the head.

"What hast thou brought thence?" asked Doctor Satan.

"The secrets of the grave," said the head.

"Do they concern any here?" asked the magician.

"They do," said the head, solemnly.

The answer caused another hush, different from the first, for it excited expectation. The trick, whatever it was, having been performed, a new interest was being roused, and Doctor Satan made this more lively by turning and saying gravely:

"My servants know the past, the present and the future. If there be any here that would have his life told him let him speak. The head of the dead boy can reveal it to him."

There was a sound of whispering through the court, as each man tried to banter his neighbor into asking for the expected revelation; but nobody could be found to take up the challenge, till Doctor Satan, after a pause, shrugged his shoulders, and said:

"What! Soldiers and afraid? I had thought better of my friends than that. Well, if you will not ask, it shall be told without the asking, from you. Albert's head knows past and present."

Then, turning to the head, he continued:

"Head of Albert, what seest thou before thee?"

The severed head was seen to turn on the tripod and look through the audience with its large dark eyes. Then it said slowly:

"I see the blue and the gray, side by side, as they shall ever be hereafter."

The sentiment was greeted with applause, and the magician said:

"So much we all know. Who leads them?"

"George Brooke," answered the head.

"And who is George Brooke?" continued Doctor Satan, while the officers and men began to look at the colonel, who was shifting uneasily on his seat, as if ill-pleased to have so much attention attracted to him before his men.

The head was silent, till the magician repeated the question, when the answer came from the pale lips:

"The foe of those who once loved him; the friend of those who will soon scorn him."

The words were hardly pronounced when Brooke started up, in a towering passion, shouting furiously:

"This has gone far enough! Keep your juggling tricks off my name, insolent mountebank! Who and what are you to take such liberties with me?"

His excited manner and angry words raised a buzz from the soldiers and almost caused the scene on the stage to be forgotten; but Doctor Satan, with a calmness that nothing disturbed, waved his hand and said quietly:

"Let the gentleman keep cool. He will need all his coolness for the time when I claim my own. I make no answers; I ask questions. If the gentleman wishes to ask he shall be answered. The head of Albert speaks; not I. Will Colonel Brooke ask for himself?"

The challenge produced a singular effect on the man addressed, for he turned pale once more and said uneasily:

"I have no questions to ask. We all know this is a trick of the senses, produced by some means or other. Do your own questioning, and keep my name out of the show, or I'll find a way to make you repent your insolence."

The soldiers whispered together and looked at the magician, who smiled in the same sneering way, as he replied:

"Then the valiant colonel dare not question the dead? He is wise; for the dead know the secrets of the past."

Then looking round at the audience, he continued slowly:

"There are others present who may not fear the past. Who sits next to Brooke?"

The head turned and spoke slowly:

"A brave soldier, who fought for his flag, and will yet shun the man he now obeys."

"And the next?" pursued the magician, while Brooke frowning, but unwilling to expose himself to ridicule, fidgeted silently on his seat beside Davol, who blushed at the plain imputation in his favor, as he sat by his colonel.

"Hard Head by name and nature," replied the head on the tripod. "He will die like a soldier, and all will mourn him when he goes."

"Who will get him?" asked Doctor Satan.

The soldiers began to laugh at their stout Teutonic major, who grew red as fire at the question, but smiled all over his broad face as the head answered:

"He will go where all good soldiers go—to the halls of the brave, to drink and feast forever."

There was another round of applause, which was changed to an audible laugh as the stout major remarked:

"Das ist gute! Bier und wein, und lieber fraulein. Gott in himmel! das ist gute."

Doctor Satan heard him and affected to shiver, as he said, in a tone of pretended terror:

"My dear sir, do not be so inconsiderate as to

talk that way. Pray consider who I am before you use the language so recklessly."

The stout major smiled all over his face, but made no reply, and the magician continued to the head:

"Can you tell us what will be the fate of this regiment?"

"It will cover itself with glory," answered the head, "and the usurper will be shot for his effort to enslave a free people."

Another round of applause still more hearty greeted the words, and the magician, with a low bow to the audience, said quietly:

"This concludes the first part of our seance this evening. After the intermission I shall show some shooting feats that will astonish you still further. But before I go, to relieve your natural fears, I will restore Albert to full life."

He went to the head on the tripod, pulling from his pocket a red handkerchief, with which he covered the ghastly object. When he turned round the head had vanished, and Doctor Satan shook out the folds of the handkerchief, showing it to be empty, when at the same moment the boy came from the wings, and bowed to the soldiers as the curtain fell to slow music.

CHAPTER III.

THE BULLET-CATCHER AND THE VISION.

THE fall of the curtain was the signal for a buzz of excited conversation all over the court as the soldiers and officers discussed the performance they had just witnessed and speculated on how the illusions had been performed.

Even in the present day such illusions are popular and very apt to excite wonder in mixed audiences, while at the time we write of—twenty years ago—very few people in the United States had ever heard of them, and the Mexicans were blissfully ignorant of the resources of modern magic.

The prevalent opinion among the soldiers of the rank and file was that Doctor Satan, while, perhaps, not the Evil One himself, was a man who had dealings with forbidden arts, and one to be feared and shunned, if not to be killed at sight.

The fact that the name of the colonel, whom all admired, had been brought into the show in a manner to throw ridicule on him, was one cause of the prevailing hostility to the magician, in spite of his wonderful performances, and Corporal Casey echoed the voice of a good many soldiers when he said:

"Bedad, and he may be the devil himself, for all I know; but I'll see av he can stop a bullet befor this night's over. D'ye mind that now, boys."

One of his comrades—a simple backwoodsman from Tennessee—here interjected the remark:

"If he's the devil, 'tain't no use shootin' at him with lead, boys. A silver bullet will fix the devil himself, I've hard my ole mammy say when I was a boy. And we hain't got a silver bullet in the hull ridgement."

He was interrupted by the sound of the piano, as the little German began to play another brilliant fantasia, with popular airs interspersed, which brought down the house. When it was over the curtain rose again and disclosed the stage bare of furniture, with a black curtain at the back covered with strange characters in pale blue from which flames seemed to be proceeding, which produced a very weird effect. Doctor Satan evidently understood the art of dressing his stage to produce the greatest and most impressive effects before he began.

There was a pause for nearly a minute for the soldiers to feel the influence of the fiery characters, and then the magician entered once more, but differently attired. He wore a long robe of black and scarlet, embroidered with ornaments from which the same lambent flame proceeded, and carried in his hand the naked sword he had used in his first act. His head was covered with a black hood, which fell over his shoulders and made the pallor of his face more remarkable.

He came to the front of the stage amid a hush that fell on the wildest after his amazing exhibition and spoke in his low, musical voice:

"I come to show you that none can resist my power and that the weapons of mortals avail not against my person. Are you all armed?"

The question produced a deeper hush for it was entirely unexpected. Corporal Casey was the first to answer from the back of the hall, flourishing his revolver:

"We are that, bedad! and ye'd better mind what ye're about, so ye had, now. All the divils in the world won't stop a bullet from this."

The magician opened his arms calmly, as if doing an ordinary thing, and pointed to a spot in the midst of his breast on which was worked a flaming heart.

"If you think you can hit that straight," he said, "fire away. But if you are a blunderer, fire not, for you might hurt a mortal."

Casey, rather taken aback by the boldness of the challenge did not immediately reply, but Colonel Brooke in the front seat jumped up and cried savagely:

"Will you give me the chance? The boys will tell you that I can drive a nail at twenty yards."

The magician turned on him with his singular

smile that had something in it doubly Satanic, as he replied:

"You are the man of all others that I would show my powers before. You will yet be my subject, below, as you are now on earth. Fire at this heart and beware that you miss not your aim, or the bullet will rebound and wound you."

"I'll take the risk of that," replied Brooke, with a sneer on his full, sensual lips. "Stand steady, man or devil! I'll prove your character a sham and yourself a fraud before I get through with you, or I am much mistaken."

As he spoke he drew out his revolver and examined it, to be sure that the charge was all right. The other officers looked a little alarmed and the major exclaimed:

"Donnerwetter, Brooke, vat you do? You vant to keel de mans, ven he only make a leedle fun mit us?"

"The man has challenged me to put a bullet in his heart, and he cannot complain if I do it," said Brooke, with a malignant sneer that he did not strive to hide. "I'll stop his juggling for a while and teach him a lesson. See if I don't!"

He raised the pistol, as he spoke, above his head, and then brought it down slowly, with the air of an old marksman, till it pointed in the direction of the magician. A second later came the flash and report, and Doctor Satan was seen to raise his hand. When the smoke cleared away the magician stood there unharmed, and called out in a voice whose sarcastic ring had in it the true diabolical flavor:

"Take back the bullet, sir! Ha! ha!"

As he spoke he threw something toward Brooke; and the stout colonel recoiled, clapping his hand to his face; for the missile, whatever it was, had struck him in the eye and half-blinded him.

Doctor Satan, seeing the effect of his retort, said sweetly:

"I beg the pardon of the gentleman for having hurt him unwittingly; but the fact is that one of my servants carried that bullet to the place where it struck. Will the gentleman please fire again to make sure that there is no mistake?"

Brooke, whose eye was painfully stung, was swearing viciously and rubbing the injured optic, while the magician was talking. As Doctor Satan stopped, the colonel shouted:

"You've half-blinded me with your infernal tricks; but here goes for you again."

As he spoke he raised the revolver once more, when Doctor Satan called out warningly:

"Take care what you do, sir, or the other eye may be blinded by my servants. Shoot straight or not at all."

"I'll shoot straight enough for you," retorted Brooke, scowling.

Then he took a careful aim, and the second shot rung through the court, when the magician was seen to jerk his head aside and raise his hand once more.

The colonel, without waiting a moment fired four more shots in rapid succession at the magician, aiming at different parts of his body, and at each shot Doctor Satan was seen to raise his hand, as if catching something in the air.

When the pistol was emptied there stood the magician; his face as white and calm as ever, while he spoke aloud, amid an intense hush:

"Five more bullets, sir. Here they are."

And he cast them at the colonel with a careless toss; the whole five striking him in the face and eliciting a cry of angry surprise and pain, as Brooke staggered back, clapping both hands over his eyes and groaning:

"Blind, by heavens! Curse the infernal hound!"

Then came a rush of the officers to his side; while the soldiers, in the rear of the court, began to shout angrily to each other, and handle their revolvers. A desperate fusillade seemed imminent, and was only stopped by the calmness of the magician, who came to the front of the stage, and said coolly:

"Don't get excited, gentlemen. This is only one of my illusions. Your colonel did his best to kill me, and I only threw him back his bullets, which have not entirely blinded him. I am only one, as you see; and you are several hundred. I have executed these feats for your amusement; and if you wish me to close the show, I will do so. But if you come to see a performance, you should not be angry with me for giving you all the illusions in the bill. The reason that I do not wish any but marksmen to shoot at me, is because there are innocent persons behind the scenes, whom you might hurt and even kill, if you fired carelessly. You have seen that I am absolutely invulnerable to the weapons of the best marksmen in your regiment. With your permission I will continue my performance, and close this shooting business."

The appeal was not without effect; the more so that the superstition of the greater portion of the audience was already excited to the utmost, and that Brooke was well known to be the best shot in the regiment. Even Corporal Casey cried out:

"Av I had a silver bullet, I'd try ye, bedad; but as I haven't, get on wid yer show, and may Ould Scratch fly away wid ye."

Doctor Satan laughed aloud.

"Spoken like a true son of Erin. We will go on with the next thing on the programme. You have seen live boys killed and brought to life. Now you shall see the ghosts of the departed appear, and disappear at my will. Behold!"

He fell back to one side of the stage, and waved his sword, the pianist playing soft music, as calmly as if nothing had happened.

The curtain at the back of the stage parted, and disclosed a black velvet backing, on which stood out a figure, that excited a buzz of admiration and wonder.

It was that of a girl of extreme beauty, with long curling hair of the palest golden tinge, but with dark eyes. She was attired in the snowy robes of a bride, and as the curtain drew aside, she cast her eyes from side to side, through the audience, and smiled.

The sight of this figure dissipated all the angry feelings that had previously existed, as if by magic, and a round of applause was given, at the end of which Doctor Satan spoke, saying:

"You see before you the spirit of a bride, who died, five years ago, in the far-off city of New York. By my power she is enabled to speak, and by my power she will vanish. I am about to question her."

Then, addressing the figure, he said:

"Spirit of the departed, why comest thou?"

The girl answered at once:

"To demand of the living the justice they never gave the dead."

"Of whom dost thou seek justice?" demanded the wizard.

"Of George Brooke," replied the girl.

Brooke, who was still rubbing his eyes on the front seats, and who had not yet seen the figure, started at the sound of his name, thus, for the second time brought before the regiment, and looked at the white figure. Half-blinded though he was, the sight seemed to electrify him, for he started back and exclaimed wildly:

"Clara Walden, alive! My God! What do you want?"

The girl answered distinctly:

"Justice for the dead and the living! Confess thy guilt!"

With a wild cry, the colonel threw up his arms as if choking—every eye in the court riveted on him as he panted for breath.

Then came a second call from the figure on the stage:

"George Brooke, confess thy guilt! Death and justice are coming!"

And then, right before the incredulous eyes of the soldiers, the girl vanished into thin air instantly; and nothing remained but the black background of the stage.

In the same instant George Brooke dropped on the pavement in a fit, and the curtain fell.

CHAPTER IV.

THE FLITTING BY NIGHT.

To say that the astounding effect on the colonel of the tricks of the magician had produced excitement in the American Regiment is to state the circumstance in its mildest form. The men were half-crazy with curiosity to find what it was all about and crowded round the colonel as he lay on the pavement, shaking and foaming at the mouth, while they forgot all about the stage and what lay behind it.

By the time Brooke had recovered, which was not till he had been liberally dashed with cold water, the officers began to think of searching the stage, and Major Hardenkopf advanced and laid his hand on the low railing that protected the footlights from the front, with the intention of going behind the curtain to find out what had become of the magician.

The moment he did so he uttered a terrified shout and stood at the front of the stage, grasping the railing, convulsed from head to foot apparently with the same tremors that had agitated the colonel, but roaring for help and unable to let go.

Two or three officers ran to his assistance, and the moment they touched him were all seized with the same convulsions, roaring for more help, while the soldiers in the rear of the court, growing frantic with fear and anger together, opened a brisk fusillade at the curtain with their pistols, not daring to go near it after what they had just seen.

From that moment the court of the *posada* became a perfect pandemonium of noise and confusion, in the midst of which the lights round the stage suddenly went out together and fiery tongues made their appearance in the air over the heads of the soldiers in the darkness that reigned in the court.

At the same time loud explosions were heard as jets of white fire shot forth in several quarters of the court at once, and the voice of Doctor Satan was heard shouting:

"Drive the presumptuous mortals from the court! Beëlzebub, do thy duty! At them, Asmodeus! Blow them to pieces! More recruits for the lake of fire!"

The sound of his voice in the darkness completed the panic that the fiery tongues and torpedoes had started, and out of the court rushed the soldiers of the American Regiment, the Mexican brigands, the women of the place, and ev-

ery one together, in a panic as wild as that of Bull Run, the boldest infected with terror.

Only the unlucky major and his comrades who were clinging to the rail in front of the stage were left behind, and their cries brought forth Doctor Satan himself, who made his appearance in front of the curtain, carrying a torch which burned a blue flame, by the light of which he surveyed the struggling men, smiling sarcastically and saying:

"Well, gentlemen, how do you like the performance? You seem to be indisposed. Why do you not let go the railing? It is against my rules for any one to touch that."

Major Hardenkopf, whose face was pale, and shaking, as with ague, stammered out painfully:

"Mein Gott! Ve—can—not—do—it—sare!"

Doctor Satan smiled in the same sarcastic way, as he retorted:

"And you sought to harm me, did you, gentlemen? You and your whole regiment cannot do that. Do my tortures hurt? They are nothing to what I have in store for you when you come down to my winter home where I keep my fires alight. Will you promise, if I let you go for awhile, to leave this place at once and not seek to penetrate my secrets any more?"

"Ye-es!" quavered the chorus, with an effect that was irresistibly ludicrous. The magician laughed scornfully as he said:

"Then go, and remember that, if you break your words, the devil himself won't save you. Go!"

As he spoke, the major dropped the railing, and the officers, who had been attached to him, so unwillingly, by the giant power of the electric battery, found themselves free, but with every nerve racked, and with such a sense of weakness, that they could hardly stagger out of the hall, though they made the best of their way to the door, with all the speed they could muster.

As they took their departure, Doctor Satan surveyed the empty court, in which he held his exhibition. It was dark now, save for the glimmering light of his torch; and the faces of the frightened soldiers could be seen at the further door, peeping out of the safe retreat of the bar-room, as if they dared not enter the place till they were sure he had gone.

The magician smiled and turned his back, going behind the curtain, where he was accosted by a tall negro, of herculean frame, who said respectfully:

"De boxes is packed, marse, and de glass all right."

Doctor Satan, now that he was not in front of the audience, had a thoughtful, weary look, very different from that he had worn before.

The artful curls that had taken the appearance of horns, had fallen, and one might, by looking closely at his feet, see that his shoes had been made with a cleft, marked on the front, which disappeared on a closer inspection. The only traces of diabolism about him were the waxed ends of his mustache, which were contradicted by the stern lines of his handsome face.

"The sooner we get out of this the better, Tom," he said, thoughtfully. "Those fellows will get over their scare, and I don't want to risk getting a shot, outside of the shell. Is the passage open?"

"Yes, marse," was the instant reply. "I seen to dat, afore we runs up de curting. Can't trust dem sogers, marse. Jess as app to shoot Missy Clary as any oder man. De waggin am loaded, and at de back wall, sah."

Doctor Satan cast a swift glance round him, as he said:

"All right. Disconnect the wires from that rail, and bring the battery out."

"De battery am in de wagon already, Marse Horry," was the reply, at which Doctor Satan laughed and patted the huge shoulders of the negro affectionately, as he said:

"Oh, Tom, Tom, you never forget anything. I don't know what I should do without you. Come along, then. Look out you don't get burned with the wire."

Tom showed his white teeth in a grin, as he stooped to the stage in the dark, and unscrewed the fastenings of the electric wire that had effected such wonders. He did it with glass-faced tools, and when his work was done, remarked:

"Dat all right now, Marse Horry. Dey kin come all dey wants, naow, and dey won't find nuffin' of Hoodoo hyar. Ya! ya!"

The magician followed his sable guide through the dark recesses of the stage to the back, and down a long passage in the walls of the old hacienda, which emerged in the starlit country, to find two heavy four-horse wagons standing there, round which was clustered a little group of men, who wore masks, and worked assilently as spirits. As he came out, two of these men went back down the passage, and soon returned, carrying with them the last vestiges of his paraphernalia. Then the magician mounted a black horse, which was brought up by Tom, and the whole caravan took its departure from the *posada* of Jago D'Obrino, by a way that none of the men in front suspected, and which took them out of El Paso into the open country.

As soon as they had left the vicinity of the hostelry they were clear of the town itself, for-

Mr. O'Brien's place was on the outskirts of El Paso, for the convenience of travelers.

Now that the magician was out in the starlight, he had drawn over his dress suit a pair of high riding-boots, and covered his form with a dark cloak which fell over the haunches of the fine charger he bestrode, with the ease and grace of an old horseman.

The men of his company had also mounted and were riding on the flanks of the wagon, to the number of ten, all told.

The boy, whoever he was, who had excited such interest in the audience had disappeared, or was in one of the wagons; it was not certain which, for the tilts were drawn closely in front, and the drivers had no lanterns with them to show who occupied the interior of the vehicles.

Out of the town they rode at a slow pace, the wheels of the wagons making so little noise that one might know something had been done to them to deaden the sound. The axles revolved silently and the wheels themselves rolled over the ground with a muffled sound, very different from the usual rattle and thump that accompanies the passage of large vehicles.

Doctor Satan seemed to be a little uneasy as the cavalcade left the vicinity of the hostelry, for he kept in the rear of the little procession and frequently looked back as he rode.

All was quiet however till the wagons had passed out of sight, then the magician rode to the head of the procession and said, in a low tone of relief, to a man who was riding there:

"We're well out of that, Charley. I thought Brooke had recognized me, and would get his whole regiment after us."

"I watched him closely from the wings," replied the other, "and I saw from the first that he did not. You have changed so much, Horace, that I should not have known you if you had not proved it to me."

"I do not fear him so much as Cortina and his ragged ruffians. There were a lot of them in the court; and I saw them watching the box-office as if they envied us the money."

Doctor Satan laughed.

"I don't fear them, Charley. I've got them so scared that they would as soon think of tackling the person they think I am as of trying to rob me."

Charley shook his head dissentingly.

"I've lived in their confounded country longer than you, and I know them well. If you hear hoofs behind you, look out for trouble, as sure as my name's Charley Walden. I only hope we get into the open country and among the yuccas soon, Horace. If we don't—Hark!"

He reined his horse sharply as he spoke and lifted his hand as a signal for silence. The wagons drew up and the horsemen halted with as little noise as they could make.

Then, on the night air, that blew faint and chill from the north, came the sound of horses at a gallop, and Charley Walden said:

"I told you so. They have got over their scare and are coming to investigate this concern. Now there is only one thing for us to do, and that is to get into hiding before they get in sight or hearing of our train. Let me see. I'll lead the way. The rest follow."

He turned his horse sharp to the right as he spoke and the cavalcade followed him off the road down a little gully that ended in a patch of wood, stunted, like everything else in that barren stretch of country; but sufficient to conceal the wagons.

The advantages of the muffling the wheels had received was apparent, as the train went down over the dry grass; and when at last it halted in the patch of wood, dark cloths were thrown over the white tilts of the wagons, which rendered them almost invisible in the dark foliage of the wood and caused Doctor Satan, who had remained behind on the road to mutter:

"That's safe enough."

He sat on his horse there, listening to the ring of the hoofs on the road, coming toward him, his black horse and black cloak making him resemble a dark statue, so still did horse and rider remain.

The magician was looking back at El Paso, and presently saw the objects of his apprehension coming toward him, a dozen horsemen, at full speed, the ringing of their spurs and bits showing that they were Mexicans, in full trappings.

Whether they saw him or not was not plain; but they continued to advance till the foremost had arrived within a few hundred yards, when the men raised a yell, as if trying to encourage each other; but at the same time slackened their speed, till they gradually came to a walk and a halt, at some distance off.

The cause of their halt was made plain by a sudden change in the appearance of the magician.

He had been busy while they were coming toward him, in making some mysterious preparations, with frequent visits to the saddle-pockets of his mount; and now he suddenly threw back the broad Mexican sombrero he had put on for riding, and began to breathe fire from his mouth, while he waved his hat in the air.

The Mexicans—for they were robbers who had come after him—saw the fiery light and

halted, trying to muster courage for a further advance. Doctor Satan, seeing their hesitation, walked his horse toward them, and, as he advanced, leaned over the head of the animal, and passed his hand down its face.

The action was greeted with a cry of alarm from the Mexicans; and one of them wheeled his horse to flee.

He had reason to fear. The magician's horse began to breathe fire like its rider, to all appearance, and the superstition of the ignorant robbers was fully excited at last.

CHAPTER V.

SATAN'S ACQUISITION.

DOCTOR SATAN continued to walk his horse toward the robbers, and the excitement and hesitation in the group grew more visible, as he came on, with his flaming mouth and fiery horse.

They began to jabber to each other in Spanish; and, at last, the leader leveled a pistol, which he fired straight at the magician.

The bullet whistled past Doctor Satan's head, and he made a gesture, as if catching it, when he cast back, at the group of horsemen, something which dropped at the feet of the front horse, and exploded with a loud report and a white flame, that sent every horse in the group plunging and kicking in a frenzy of terror, in spite of the severe bits of the riders.

One of the animals dropped in the road, and the magician cast a second missile, which produced another explosion, that completed the panic. Another horse dropped and rose again, limping; while the rest of the horsemen, firing a few random shots, fled in dismay, leaving the man who had scared them master of the field.

One of the horses had been killed by his explosive missile, and the rider, who had apparently been injured at the same time, lay under his mount, groaning dismally and unable to extricate himself.

Doctor Satan raised a silver whistle to his lips, and the sound brought to his side a couple of horsemen from the wood, to whom he said quietly:

"Search that fellow under the horse, and find who he is. Make him tell you everything he knows."

The two men bowed and galloped up to the wounded Mexican, who, as he saw them coming, called out piteously, in Spanish:

"Mercy, for the love of Heaven, gentlemen! I am dying!"

One of them sprung from his horse by the prostrate man, and by a little exertion dragged him out from under the horse.

Dying or not, he seemed to be pretty strong yet, for he gave them a hard struggle to get him forward to Doctor Satan—the man crazy with fear, and yelling, in Spanish, all sorts of invocations to the Virgin and saints to "help him and deliver him from the power of the Evil One."

When they at last got him near the magician, he seemed to be paralyzed with terror, for he dropped on his knees and stared at Doctor Satan, shaking all over.

Truth to tell, the appearance of the doctor might have shaken stronger nerves than those of a superstitious Mexican; for the man of magic had been at work transmogrifying his outward semblance while his men were struggling with the Mexican, and was now glowing in a fiery skeleton, traced on his body, and carried in his hand a two-pronged fork, scintillating with fire.

As the frightened Mexican sunk on his knees before him, the doctor said to him, in Spanish:

"You have dared to follow me, and my men must take you where I reign alone. Are you ready to go there?"

The Mexican shrieked aloud:

"Mercy, mercy! Good Señor Diablo! I will never do it again!"

"You never shall," was the grim reply.

"Once my servant, always mine. All the saints in your calendar cannot save you now. I laugh at your lady of Guadalupe; I spit on your saints. You are mine, and I want a good fat Mexican to make the fire burn bright below."

He made a gesture as if he were about to transfix the trembling wretch with the fork, and the Mexican yelled wildly and shrieked:

"I will do anything if you will spare me. I will be your slave! I will bring you all the souls that you desire! Only don't burn me yet, for I am not fit to die."

Doctor Satan laughed sarcastically.

"So much the better for me. No man can cheat me if I once get him in my power, and you are a robber and a murderer. You are mine already beyond a peradventure. If I let you live a little longer it will only be to serve me. Do you understand?"

The trembling wretch clasped his hands, ejaculating:

"I understand, good master, and I will obey. Indeed I will. Only let me live a little longer to repent my sins."

The magician laughed again.

"That is just what I do not want. If you try to cheat me, I shall kill you now."

"Then I won't repent. I'll be as wicked as you want me. I'll do anything to serve you."

Only help me and make me rich. A soul is worth a good deal to you, is it not?"

The accent of honest conviction in which he spoke was almost too much for the gravity of the magician, but he controlled his features enough to answer gravely:

"Your soul is mine already. I do not need to buy it. If I let you live it will only be to serve me. Will you do it?"

The Mexican raised his hand to Heaven, ejaculating eagerly:

"I swear by all the saints—"

"That will do," interrupted the doctor, unceremoniously. "Answer my questions, and remember that, if you lie, you die instantly, and my men take you to the lake of fire, to burn forever."

"I will tell the truth—indeed I will," cried the trembling wretch.

"Who sent you after me?" asked the magician.

"The American colonel," was the reply.

"Who led your party?"

"Cortina himself."

"What did the American colonel tell you?"

"That you were not the—the—pardon me, master; but he said the Evil One himself. He told us to find your train and shoot you and rob the wagons. He said that there was plenty of money there, and a beautiful girl, and that all the men were to be killed—and—"

"And what of the girl?" asked Doctor Satan, sternly.

The Mexican hesitated and at last burst out desperately:

"It was the colonel said it—not I, good master. He said that the girl must be killed, for, while she lived, he was not safe."

The magician nodded his head and turned abruptly away, as if he wished a little leisure to think over what he had heard.

When he came back, his face was grave and stern, as he said to the trembling wretch at his feet:

"Listen to me, and remember that I mean what I say."

"Indeed and indeed, I will obey every word!" protested the man.

"What is your name?" asked the magician.

"Diego Gonzales," was the humble reply.

"Then hearken, Diego. You will go back to your colonel, and tell him that you have seen me, and that, if he persists in following me, all his regiment will not save him from the lake of fire. That I will come to him, in the midst of his camp, spite of all the sentries he can put round his tent, and drag him to the justice he has defied so long. Tell him that, if he ceases to pursue me, and tries to live a good life, he may get the privilege of dying like a soldier; but that, if he makes another attempt to follow me, he will be hung, like the murderer he is. Will you give that message faithfully?"

The Mexican listened, trembling; and when the magician had finished, he repeated the message, almost word for word.

Doctor Satan nodded and said quietly:

"Get up, then."

When the man had risen from his knees, the magician continued:

"Are you hurt?"

Diego passed his hands over his limbs doubtfully, and said:

"I thought I was, señor; but it seems to have passed away."

"Then listen to me. I need a servant in your camp, who will bring me news," said the magician, slowly. "If you will serve me faithfully, I will make you rich, and pay you, for every report that pleases me, five ounces of gold. If you bring me a false report, I shall send you down where you belong. Now will you serve me faithfully?"

"I will, by all the saints in Mexico," was the earnest reply.

Doctor Satan nodded again reassuringly.

"If you do, it will be well for you. Go back now, and find out all you can. Meet me at midnight, on the road from El Paso to Chihuahua, at a solitary palm tree, that stands on a hill by the Conchos. Do you know the place?"

"I do, master," was the trembling reply.

"It is well," said Doctor Satan. "Meet me at midnight, three days from to-morrow, at that place; and bring me all the news you have, as to this American colonel, and his regiment. Now go, and do not attempt to look behind you, or one of my imps may catch you by the hair, and drag you down below, when you least expect."

The frightened bandit needed no second bidding, for he turned and ran off, on the road to El Paso, with a speed that was amazing, considering the fall he had had under his horse, and his assertions that he had been "dying."

The magician watched him till he had gone out of sight, when he said to his men:

"Bring up the wagons again. They will follow us no further, after that coward gets to them, with his story. I will ride on alone. Tell Mr. Walden to take the wagons round, by the best way he knows."

He mounted his horse, which he had left for the purpose of getting nearer to the kneeling bandit, and rode quietly off down the road, which grew rougher and rougher at every step, as it advanced further into the bowels of the land of Mexico.

By the time he had ridden a mile or two, he heard the dull rumble of the wagons behind him, and was joined by them, just as the character of the country began to change—the mountains rising on either hand, and coming closer to the road, as they advanced.

All night long the little train rumbled on, and when the first streaks of dawn reddened the east, the wagons were halted by the banks of a little stream, that came in from the mountains, and were parked in a dense coppice or chaparral, that completely concealed them from view from any passengers that might come along.

There the men of the train kindled fires, and pitched a tent, into which Doctor Satan entered, to seek the repose he needed so much.

CHAPTER VI.

MARCHING ORDERS AND SILVER BULLETS.

COLONEL GEORGE BROOKE, his bull-dog face set and gloomy, was seated on a stone bench outside the tavern of Mr. O'Brien, at El Paso, on the morning after the entertainment which had terminated so strangely for him and others.

His next officer, Davol, was by him, studying the ground, on which he was tracing patterns with the end of his scabbard, as if in deep thought, and a silence had come between them.

Old Fritz Hardenkopf, the major, looking pale and flabby—as if his electric treatment, of the night before, had left him shaky enough—was eating a sandwich, made of the sausage and rye-bread dear to the German heart, though as dry as a chip from the journey it had made, in the major's baggage, from New Orleans.

At last the colonel remarked moodily:

"Well, it's no use talking of the fellow. I'll allow that he got the best of me with his confounded tricks; but I'll get even with him yet, if we meet him."

"He seemed to have some special spite against you, Brooke," said Davol, thoughtfully. "Did you ever see the man before?"

Brooke bit his lip, and then answered, through his clenched teeth:

"No, of course not. What put such an idea in your head? I don't know the mountebank."

"Then what made you drop off so when that girl showed up?" the other asked. "By the by, boys, how the dickens could that trick have been managed? One moment she stood out, as clear as could be, and spoke out, too. I saw her lips move and heard her voice. She wasn't a deception, anyway. That was a real woman, I'd swear to it anywhere. And yet, by George, she vanished into thin air, like smoke. I don't see how the thing was managed. I begin to believe that conjuror has dealings with the old fellow downstairs, after all. I'm not superstitious; but, by Jove, I have to believe my eyes. They don't deceive a man."

The major suspended the munching of his sausage to say:

"Dot is nodings, mein freund. In de old country, ve haf such dings, all de time. Dot is v'ot ve call de zauberwerk—you say vitchcraft. Dem magic fellers, dey can turn into air, shust so quick as nodings. Dot gal she vas mate of shmoke; and dot vas all dere vos about it."

Davol shook his head obstinately, as he answered:

"Smoke don't talk. Smoke don't cast a shadow. Smoke don't look right into a man's eyes; and that girl looked me straight in the face for nigh a minute. She wasn't smoke, major. As I said, I have to believe my eyes, after all, and they showed me that girl, one moment, and the next she was gone. If he has not dealings with the Evil One, how did he do it? You tell us, Brooke, if you can."

Brooke shook his head gloomily.

"Don't ask me; I am not in the business."

Hardenkopf here swallowed the last mouthful of his sausage, and observed slowly:

"Colonel, tit you efer see dot gal befor?"

The colonel flushed deeply at the question, for no one but the phlegmatic major would have asked it. His thick skin and matter-of-fact temperament made him careless of what he said and did, when Davol or any of the other officers would have hesitated. For a moment Brooke hardly knew what to answer, and then said stiffly:

"That is a question, Major Hardenkopf, that concerns myself alone. Please to change the subject."

The old major coughed slightly. His imperfect knowledge of the English language made him impervious to any implied rebuke, and he pursued tranquilly:

"But all de mans in de regiment is talking about it, colonel. Dey say you cry out some name or oder—Clara somedings. Vat vas dot name, Davol? You remember it, ven Brooke tumble down, like as he vas deat? Clara Val—Val—Vat vas dot name?"

Davol, looking uneasily at his commander, answered:

"Clara Walden was the name; but the colonel does not wish to talk about it. Probably the girl resembled some one he knew in former times. Please drop the subject, like a good fellow."

Brooke gave him a grateful glance; but Har-

denkopf, with the persistence that marked his race, answered rather testily:

"V'at dot pisness of yours, Davol? I am no leedle poy v'at go to school. I ask v'at suit me."

Then, turning to Brooke, with his stolid German face set like a rock, he pursued:

"Tid you efer see dot gal befor, colonel?"

"What girl do you mean?" growled Brooke, who seemed uneasy as he found that his manner had no effect on the nerves of his phlegmatic major.

"I mean dot gal v'at come on de stage and call out to you to confess somedings or oder," answered Hardenkopf, doggedly. "V'at she vant you to confess, colonel? Did you know dot gal? Haf you peen a pad poy? Hey? V'at dey call preeches promise—hey?"

Brooke burst into an uneasy laugh.

"Confound it, no, man! If you really want to know, she was very like a lady I was engaged to marry and who died on her wedding day. That is all. I suppose the likeness startled me and upset my nerves; that is all, I assure you. And now, like a good fellow, please don't talk of it any more. It is very painful to me."

The moment he said that, the good-hearted Hardenkopf got red and confused, saying hurriedly:

"I vas apologize, colonel. I tid not mean to hoort your feeling. I say no moor about it. Dot vas all right."

Drawing out his pipe and lighting it, a rather awkward silence ensued, which was broken by the entrance of one of the soldiers, who came riding up to the tavern and dismounted before the group of officers with a yellow envelope in his belt. They all recognized the colonel's orderly, who handed Brooke the envelope which he hurriedly broke open to run his eye over the contents.

His face brightened and he exclaimed:

"Marching orders at last, gentlemen. President Juarez summons the American Regiment to march to the siege of Queretaro, where the usurper Maximilian has taken refuge, and from whence we propose to drive him at once. Where is Adjutant Crocker?"

"Shall I find him, colonel?" asked the orderly.

Brooke nodded, and the colonel began to discuss the news in the dispatches that he had just received. By the time he had read them aloud the adjutant bustled up, and within half an hour from that time the camp of the American Regiment was a scene of apparent confusion, but real order soon came out of the chaos as the men took up their arms and packed their slender equipments for the march.

As the trumpets blew the assembly, the colonel was attracted by the sight of a ragged Mexican covered with dust, who came limping up to him, and whom he instantly recognized as one of the men he had sent out after the magician the night before. None of the others had made their appearance, and Brooke hastily addressed the man—Diego Gonzales—asking him:

"Well, did you get the man and the girl?"

Diego hesitated and turned pale as he faltered out:

"Señor Colonel, we could not do it. He is no man, but the Evil One himself. He threw flames of fire at us and killed my horse, and sent all the rest of them away so that we shall never see them again. I am the only one alive, señor, and I was nearly killed."

Brooke frowned deeply.

"Tell me all about it," he said, harshly.

Thus urged, Diego gave a short account of the way in which his party had been worsted, saying nothing of his own promises, however, and finally delivering the message which Doctor Satan had given him, at the sound of which Brooke changed color visibly.

When the Mexican had finished the colonel bit his lip thoughtfully, and, after a pause, said:

"You did the best you could, and you shall not regret it. But the man has fooled you. He is no evil spirit, but a man like yourself, who knows a good many tricks. Are you sure you have seen nothing of Cortina, and the rest of them?"

"No, señor," declared Diego, in a frightened sort of way. "The Evil One must have caught them. Surely he must be the Evil One; for no man can breathe flames of fire, and throw things which kill horses and burn them up, without a gun or pistol."

Brooke grunted impatiently.

"Well, well, find the others, and remember that the day you catch him you will get plenty of money. Follow the regiment."

He rode to the head of his men, who were beginning to move out, and the Mexican stole off, muttering as he went:

"It is very fine; but all the same, if you had been there you would have known it was the Evil One himself."

He went to the quarters of his friends in the town, to get a horse, and found there, in hiding, his comrades whom he had missed, including the bandit chief, Cortina, himself—all crestfallen in the extreme, but much relieved at his reappearance.

Cortina, the well-known Mexican bandit chief, who played the rôle of "patriot" during the war against Maximilian, because it offered opportunities for plunder, was a man rather superior to the other Mexicans in his band, though his superstition had got the best of him when he fled from Doctor Satan.

He questioned Gonzales closely on the particulars of his interview with the magician, and got more out of him than Brooke had, though the man feared the threats of the magician too much to let out the fact that he had promised to become his servant.

When Cortina heard what Brooke had said about Doctor Satan being "only a man who knew a great many tricks," he said to his men:

"The American colonel is right. We were deceived last night; but there is a way we can beat this magician, if he be the devil himself. We must cast silver bullets and go after him again. A silver bullet is effectual against wizards and any evil spirit."

The proposition was one that exactly suited his ignorant hearers, and raised their spirits to a pitch as high as their previous despondency had been deep.

Cortina produced a number of true silver dollars, which he took from a bag in which were kept the funds of the troop, acquired by successful robberies, and they went to one of the humble silversmiths of the town, who speedily melted the dollars into a little pool of glowing white molten metal, from which silver bullets were cast to fit all the revolvers in the party.

Thus provided, the party, now numbering thirty men, set out on the trail taken by the American Regiment, mounted and armed as richly as only Mexican bandits go, and galloped off gayly till they overtook the regiment, halted for the noon meal, some ten miles from the town of El Paso, on the road to Chihuahua.

Diego Gonzales was with the rest, and full of high spirits, as he thought, in his ignorant superstition, that he had at last found a way by which he could rid himself of his supposed engagement to serve the Evil One, in the person of Doctor Satan.

As they rode up to the regiment, they were greeted with a cheer, for the men knew them and had been accustomed to depend on the mounted Mexicans to do their scouting, ahead of the column.

Brooke recognizing the troop, rode out to meet them, saluting Cortina with military precision, and opening a conversation by saying:

"Well, Captain Cortina, I am glad you have come, for we anticipate some trouble. The pickets report some suspicious signs ahead, and I wish you to ride on, and to make no scruple of shooting any person you find on the road, who cannot show conclusively that he is a friend to the Liberals."

He said this so that all the men could hear him, but with a sly look at Cortina, which the other understood, for he said:

"Your orders shall be obeyed, colonel. God save President Juarez!"

Then, lowering his voice as he ranged alongside of Brooke, he added:

"Have any signs been seen of the magician?"

"We have met some countrymen who saw him pass by this morning, and who say he has gone into camp in a gully twenty miles from here. They rode by this morning. Are your men ready? They will not be afraid in the daytime, will they?"

Cortina shook his head.

"Not now. They have cast silver bullets, you know, and that will give them courage. For my part, colonel, I confess, I am afraid, in the night, at the appearance of the man, and you would have been so too. But in the daytime it is different. My men will face anything then. The trickster shall be killed."

Then he hesitated, and added still lower:

"It is understood that there are no questions to be asked, you know, as to the money and the girl. I don't want any trouble with the men of your regiment, you know—"

Brooke held out his hand.

"Do just as you please about all of them, as long as I never see the fellow again. He must have a good deal of money with him, for I find he has been taking a tour through all Texas, and there was plenty of gold there."

Cortina's eyes sparkled, and he clasped Brooke's hand warmly. Then he turned and rode off with his men at a hand-gallop for several miles more, till the mountains that had greeted Doctor Satan at sunrise that day loomed up before him, and he descried some horsemen coming toward him on the dusty road. Then he reined up, saying:

"Load your pistols with silver bullets, boys. Yonder comes the accursed magician!"

CHAPTER VII.

THE DANITES.

THE party which had attracted the notice of Cortina was composed of horsemen, some six or seven in number, and was a long way down the road when he first spied the dust.

The horses were at a gallop when he saw them, but came to a full stop as soon as the Mexicans halted, while the flash of a glass from the leader of the strange band showed that he was looking at Cortina through a telescope of some kind.

The Mexican bandit, having no glass, was nevertheless favored with a pair of eyes as sharp as those of an Indian, and, after a close scrutiny on his own part, announced:

"That is not the magician. It is a party of Mormons."

The discovery produced not a little excitement among the bandits, for it was well known that a Mormon expedition had entered Mexico, not long before, with the object of founding a colony there, in which they could retain their own peculiar institutions, secure against the interruptions of the United States Government at the close of the American civil war. This expedition was said to be composed of men high in the Mormon hierarchy, having three apostles and a band of the famous Danites with them, the whole forming a force whose aid or opposition was not to be despised by either side in the war that was then raging in Mexico.

Therefore, as soon as Cortina spied the Mormons coming down the road, he made up his mind that if they were friends of the magician he might have to give up the enterprise, while if they could be got to take part in the assault on Doctor Satan, he should feel sure of success and be able to defy superstition.

After a little pause to examine them, he rode forward at a slow pace, watching the strangers closely. As he drew nearer he perceived that the leader of the Mormon band was a man he had never seen before—very tall and thin, with a long red beard, coming to a point near his waist, and a grave, solemn aspect.

His companions were all powerful men, with the same air of gravity that marked his own face. They were attired, for the most part, in dark garments, and carried repeating rifles and a pair of revolvers each, in belts round their waists, while their saddles had holsters, from which peeped the butts of other revolvers. Small as was the number of the party, it was evidently armed to the teeth; and the resolute air of its members showed they were not to be trifled with by such bandits as those of Cortina, who were armed, for the most part, with sabers, pistols and brass-barreled blunderbusses of the old "trabuco" pattern.

As the two parties approached each other, the mutual distrust and caution exhibited by each was instructive.

Cortina slackened his pace from a gallop to a trot, and finally to a walk, while the Mormons advanced at the same slow pace, and as they came, threw their rifles to the front, laid them across their knees on the saddles, and brought their revolvers into a position for instant use.

When they came within some hundred and fifty yards, the Mormon leader waved his hand as a signal for the others to stop, and took up his rifle, a motion imitated by his comrades. As the bandits continued to advance, he cocked the rifle, and the whole seven of the Mormons pointed their weapons at the Mexicans and shouted:

"HALT!"

Then, and not till then, the order was obeyed; but Cortina, in an undertone, said to his men as he glanced at the Mormons:

"Be ready to charge them when I give the word. We are five to one, if we can get close enough."

But he halted, for all that, with his revolver in his hand, and scanned the enemy warily. His own men had in their party some twenty revolvers; but no repeating rifles, and their odds in number could not be used to advantage as long as they were outside of the range of their pistols.

The Mormon leader was the first to open the parley by crying in Spanish:

"Who are you for?"

"Juarez and the Republic of Mexico," cried Cortina in answer.

Then he returned the question and the Mormon answered readily:

"We are for the Republic of Mexico and the Latter Day Saints."

Cortina replied in the same loud tone:

"Then we are friends. Let us advance."

And he urged his horse forward, when the Mormon leader raised his rifle and shouted sternly:

"HALT!"

And Cortina halted, turning a little pale as he did so.

Then the Mormon continued:

"Let your party go back and do you advance alone, after you have laid down your arms. This country is at war and no man is safe. If you want to talk we must be sure you are friends."

Cortina hesitated and at last answered:

"I will meet you alone, midway; but I will not lay down my arms. I have as much right to suspect you, as you me."

The Mormon nodded.

"That is fair. Let your men retire to the foot of that palm on the side of the road, and my men shall go back the same distance. I will stay

where I am, and you shall come forward when your men are at the foot of the tree."

Cortina looked round at the tree indicated, and seeing that it was less than a hundred yards behind, nodded his acquiescence.

"I agree to the terms," he said.

Then he ordered his men back, remaining where he was, while the Mormons, at a signal from their leader, retired at a walk to a place at an equal distance. When both parties had got to their respective positions, the two men advanced and met midway.

Then the bandit chief for the first time noticed that he had unwittingly put himself at the mercy of the Mormon. The six men, at the orders of the Mormon chief, had rifles pointed toward him, and he was well within their range; while the pistols of his own men could barely reach the chief and were utterly inadequate to carry as far as the riflemen.

The Mormon leader on his part exhibited no sign of consciousness of his position. He kept his rifle in front with one hand on the trigger, ready to fire, and as Cortina got within a few feet, he said sharply:

"Take care! No nearer!"

The bandit had his pistol pointed at the other; but he halted and said, in a voice not quite steady:

"What is the matter? I tell you I am a friend."

"That may be," was the stern answer, "but you keep your pistol too nigh me. Put it down, and I will do the same."

Cortina hesitated a moment and then lowered the pistol, when the Mormon chief threw his rifle into the hollow of his arm and said:

"That is well. Who are you?"

"Juan Cortina," was the proud answer.

The Mormon seemed to know the name well, for he smiled.

"I have heard of you before. I am Gideon, the Apostle of the Lord and the Latter Day Saints. What are you doing on this road?"

Cortina saw that he had nothing to fear now, for the face of the Mormon had become friendly, and he answered at once:

"I am seeking an Imperial spy, a conjurer, who has passed on the road to Chihuahua. It may be you have seen him. He has some wagons and a handsome girl with him, disguised as a boy."

The eyes of the Mormon chief glistened at the words.

"Indeed? What sort of a looking man is he?"

"A tall, slender man, very dark, with a face like those of the pictures of the Evil One in the churches. He has two wagons and some men on horseback."

Gideon, the Apostle nodded thoughtfully.

"Then we have seen the man."

"Where?" asked the bandit, eagerly.

The Mormon smiled.

"Question for question. Why do you want to know?"

"That we may kill the man and plunder his wagons," said Cortina, in the coolest manner. "He has a quantity of money in them, and if you will join us, you can have your share."

The apostle looked gravely at him.

"My share in what?"

"Whatever you please," said the bandit, eagerly. "The man has but ten at the most with him; and with your band, we shall have nigh to forty men. Your men have rifles, and mine have swords. We can take his camp in ten minutes, if we go about it in the right way."

Gideon the Apostle seemed to be considering before he answered:

"And you say that the man is a spy of the usurper Maximilian?"

"I am sure of it," said Cortina, eagerly, seeing that the other was seeking a pretext to join him.

The Mormon threw his rifle to his back, as a signal that he had no further fears of his interlocutor.

"In that case, I am ready to clean out the nest of traitors. We are the allies of the Republic, and have promised to help the President by all means in our power, in consideration of the grant of land in the province of Sonora, which he has promised us."

Then, seeing that Cortina was waiting for him to speak more explicitly, he added:

"I passed the man in camp, some three miles back; but he was then breaking up, to go on toward Chihuahua. We shall catch him on the road, if we ride fast, and if he is in the plain over which I came from Chihuahua, we can circle him as the Indians do, and pick off every man he has."

Cortina, delighted at the idea, exclaimed:

"The very plan for us. The sooner we join forces the better."

He beckoned to his men to come on, and within ten minutes after, Mormon and bandit were riding peacefully side by side, the Mormons talking bad Spanish, and the Mexicans worse English, as they discussed the prospects of their raid.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE ATTACK.

THE camp of the magician, as the Mormon leader had said, was a few miles from the place

at which the bandits met Gideon the Apostle. Being at no great distance from the road, the passage of the Mormon deputation had been observed by the men on guard for the magician, and they had reported it to Doctor Satan, who was in his tent, asleep, at the time.

The news had brought him out to see the Mormons, and as soon as the Saints had gone by on the road to El Paso, the magician ordered his camp broken up, and started on the road to Chihuahua; his wagons going at a fast walk.

Charley Walden rode beside him at the head of the party, and the two men conversed in low tones about the Mormons.

Walden seemed to know the leader of the Mormons by sight; for he said to his companion:

"That Gideon is the leader of the Destroying Angels, Horace; and he means us mischief, if he can get a chance."

Doctor Satan, or Horace, as his familiar friends called him, made answer in the same guarded way:

"What makes you think so?"

"Because I know the man well. I saw him when I was in California; and he is one of the desperadoes that were sent out of the country by the Vigilantes. His real name is Scott, and he murdered ten men in one month, in his gambling-house at Frisco. He is a bad lot, and we cannot be too careful of him."

Doctor Satan nodded thoughtfully.

"That may well be, but there is something you don't know about him yet, Charley."

"And what is that?" asked Walden.

The magician's eyes gleamed with some hidden feeling, as he said:

"That man was Brooke's tool, in the matter you know of. He was the chief of the gang that took me—you know when."

Walden seemed to be much surprised at the news, for he said:

"Are you absolutely sure of that, Horace? Remember that it is five years, and the man must have changed since then. Besides—"

"Besides," interrupted Horace, impatiently.

"I tell you I make no mistakes. He was one of the officers that took me, and what is more, he was one of the attendants afterwards. He and I had more than one fight, and he knows me well. It is lucky that he did not see me to-day, for you know what an accusation he can bring, and what it is sure to mean among these superstitious fools here. Either we must keep out of his way, or he must be killed to silence him."

Walden appeared to be thoughtful over what his companion said.

"That is a bad thing to happen just now, Horace. As far as Brooke is concerned we could handle him; for his own superstition is a thing to be reckoned on. And he has no papers or proofs either. He uniformly denied having known anything about your disappearance. But if this fellow knows you he may give trouble. Still there is this one chance. He may not know you. You are so changed that I did not know you myself, and he has no sharper eyes than I have, and only knew you for a short time."

The magician shook his head.

"It will not do to reckon on that too much. I am changed, but the eyes of Gideon Scott are sharp, and he is not easily deceived. I must disguise a little more to elude his notice, and if he comes after me there is no choice for me. He must be killed, or he will ruin all our plans to obtain justice."

"Then the sooner he is killed the better," said Walden. "If he meets Brooke he is sure to have a consultation, and the two, comparing notes, will be able to find out who you are, and take their measures to have you destroyed before you have accomplished your purpose. I don't see what to do except to go after him and fight him."

Horace rode on after this speech, in a brown study for nearly a mile, buried in deep thought. At last he said in a low tone, as if revolving something he hardly dared to say aloud:

"There is one way we can get safety, Charley."

"And what is that?" asked his companion.

Horace looked round him as if apprehensive of being overheard, and said in almost a whisper:

"Change sides."

Walden started as if amazed.

"But we have no sides here," he said.

Horace smiled.

"Very true; but hitherto we have been among the Juarists. If we go to Queretaro we shall be as safe as anywhere else, as long as the city is not taken. Afterwards we shall be no worse off than if we were in the American Regiment."

Walden did not seem to like the idea, for he said, gravely:

"But we don't want to support that Austrian fellow. He is nothing but an outsider anyway, and we don't want such in America."

The magician nodded.

"That is true enough; but at the same time you and I are neither of us Mexicans, and we go where we are safest. If we want to make Brooke confess his crimes publicly, and make restitution, we must be in a position to exert pressure on him, and now that this Mormon has made his appearance, the tables are turned.

By the by, I wonder how in the world he got to be a Mormon?"

Walden shrugged his shoulders.

"He had to make tracks from Frisco in a hurry, and I suppose he turned up in Salt Lake City in want of a job. He is just the fellow the Saints want for one of the Danites, and that is why they have sent him on here. You know there is a deputation of over a hundred of them down here to help the Juarists, with the promise of a grant in Sonora if they turn out Maximilian? It is lucky that the American Regiment is a good many miles behind, and that your friend Cortina got such a scare last night."

The words were hardly out of his mouth, when the sound of a shot, on the road behind the wagons, attracted their attention, and both wheeled their horses instantly to look back.

The wagons were close behind them, with the attendants riding on either side, but far in the rear the magician had left a man, with orders to watch, and signal anything following.

As they looked back now, they saw the white puff of smoke that floated past the head of this man, showing that he had fired his piece. His back was turned to the wagons, and he was intently observing something behind them, which they could not see for a dip in the road. He himself was about a mile off.

Doctor Satan pulled out a strong glass from his holster, and leveled it at the distant scout.

Presently he said:

"Some one is following us, and he is going to signal. There!"

As he looked, the man who had fired was seen to turn his horse and ride in a short circle, at a gallop, on the rising ground on which he had halted.

Walden uttered an exclamation of satisfaction.

"Glad we taught them the Indian signal. There is an enemy on our track. Count the turns he makes."

They could see the horse make four turns, when the horseman fired his piece again; threw the animal on its haunches, and held up both his arms like a cross.

"Forty men," said Walden, interpreting the signal. "Then the sooner we get to cover the better. Here comes Bob, like a good fellow."

As he spoke, the scout who had made the signal put spurs to his horse, and came galloping toward them, as hard as he could go, in a manner that showed he wished to get to shelter as soon as possible. Doctor Satan cast a glance round him to examine the country for a defensive position, and saw one not far off.

They were in the midst of a desert plain that stretched for some ten miles ahead, with groups of rocks scattered here and there. One of these groups was not more than two hundred yards off, with a look about it of being some remnant of the ancient Aztecs, or their predecessors, the Toltecs, in the way the stones were arranged. Something like the Druid temples of Europe, a circle of huge stones surrounded a central space, with a gateway left for entrance; and the magician at once directed his wagons to be taken there, and driven inside the circle, while his men disposed themselves behind the rocks, for a defense of the place against anything that might be coming after them.

By the time they had got there, the scout came galloping up, and reported a body of Mexicans, with the Mormons they had seen in the morning, coming after the train at a canter. He had waited to count them, and reported them at about forty men, all told.

He had hardly concluded his report when mounted figures came over the rise of ground in the distance from which the scout had come; and within a few minutes developed into forty horsemen, coming at the wagons at full speed, in a manner unmistakably hostile.

The magician seemed to be perfectly cool, in spite of the odds against him, for he spoke calmly to his men, observing:

"Keep your fire till you see their faces plainly, boys; and take down the man with a red beard first. He is the leader."

The two drivers of the wagons had got off their boxes, hopped the legs of their mules to prevent their stampeding, and were added to the defenders of the train, rifle in hand.

Tom, the huge negro, was one of them, and as his master spoke to the rest, he replied aloud:

"Don't you be 'fraid, Marse Horry. We fix dem fellers quick. Dem only no-count yaller-hides, anyhow. Greasers! sho!"

His accent was one of such indescribable scorn that it raised a laugh among the men, and Walden cried:

"Good for you, Tom! We'll sweeten their coffee for them!"

Tom grinned proudly at the suggestion, as he said:

"Dat all right, Marse Charley. We give 'em what dey want. Nigger good 'nuff to fight when white man don't want 'list. Hey, Marse Charley? Tom shoot well as any of 'em. Look dar now. I show ye."

The enemy coming toward them had now developed into a long line of horsemen, strung out into a regular procession, all at a gallop in the Indian style; and it became evident that they were going to adopt the Indian tactics of

circling round the defenses of the little train, to confuse and disconcert the men behind them by an attack on many quarters at once.

At first they kept out of gunshot, and swept round the whole circle, till their full force had been developed, when the leader inclined his horse inward, an example that was followed by all the rest, who came sweeping down toward the wagons at a gallop, from all sides.

The movement was different from what Indians would have made, as it brought matters to a crisis sooner. Within three minutes from the time the circle was complete, the leader was within gunshot; and Tom fired at him with such deliberate aim that the man with the red beard came tumbling to the ground, horse and all, when a rapid fusillade ensued from both sides, the bullets striking the rocks and knocking splinters into the faces of its defenders, while horse after horse of the assailants fell, to rise no more.

Then was seen the difference between Mexicans and men of American race among the assailants. As soon as the bullets began to fly thickly, Cortina turned tail, with all his men, hanging back behind the Mormons, who struggled on alone, till they nearly reached the stone circle, firing like demons, and flinching from no exposure as they came.

The red-bearded Gideon, whose horse had been shot, was seen to struggle up from the animal's body, and throw himself down behind it, from which shelter he opened fire with his repeating rifle, with a rapidity and precision that showed him a first-class marksman.

Charley Walden soon uttered a cry, as a bullet went through the fleshy part of his arm, and another man fell dead under the aim of the dauntless Mormon; but such a fire was immediately concentrated on the dead horse, behind which he was hiding, that he was unable to send in another shot, while the defection of his Mexican allies had left him and his Mormon friends nearly alone. Four of the Mormons lay dead in front of the stone breastwork, and the others had fled, when Gideon suddenly jumped up from behind his dead horse, dropped again almost instantly, to evade the volley that was fired at him; and was seen running off, covered by the fire of his Mormon allies, who came dashing down to occupy the attention of his foes, in true Indian style.

What was more, he was seen to get off safe, or at least was not killed, though he might easily have been wounded and the fact not have been noticed.

But he and his friends retired, and a lull came in the hostilities, when Doctor Satan and Walden counted up their casualties, and found one man killed and two more wounded. One of these was the second in command, whose arm was bleeding, though the injury was not serious, while the other man had been grazed by a bullet, which had cut his cheek open.

But the attack was over for the time, and the enemy could be seen clustered on the rising ground beyond, where a fierce dispute was evidently going on between the Mormons and Mexicans.

It went so far that some shots were fired, and a general free fight ensued in which Mexican and Mormon mingled in conflict, the affair ending in a confused flight of the whole body in a manner which made it difficult to tell which had beaten.

As they went, first one man then another was seen to drop from his horse, and Doctor Satan, watching them intently through his glass, said presently:

"The Mormons have got the worst of it. The Mexicans were close enough to use their pistols and swords. I think we may safely break camp and march out."

He watched a little longer, till the Mexicans had gone over the hill, still fighting, when he ordered out the wagons again, and the little caravan proceeded on its way toward Chihuahua.

The wagons drove on at a more rapid pace than they had previously held, and the escort of men rode in the rear with many a backward look for fear of their foes coming after them. The dead man had been placed in one of the vehicles, for there was no time to bury him, and the whole caravan had an aspect of hurry and alarm that was a great contrast to the quiet way in which it had hitherto proceeded.

But nothing further came to molest them till the sun began to slope toward the west, when the mountains again came near to the road, and Walden said to Horace:

"There is a tribe of Indians round here that I know of, who can help us if they will. Anyway, the experiment is worth trying, and if we don't get help somewhere we are going to come out of the small end of the horn. Let us turn into the mountains here. I know the way to their camp."

CHAPTER IX. THE TOLTECAS.

AWAY in the heart of the mountains of northern Mexico but within a few miles of the lines of travel, have lived, ever since the conquest of Mexico by Cortez, certain Indian tribes who have never yet submitted to the Mexican Government, and who are only recognized as exist-

ing by their periodical raids into Texas and all over the northern States of the Republic of Mexico itself. These Indians speak Spanish fluently, and individuals of them, mingling with the Indians of the plains who have submitted to their conquerors, come down from their mountains in peaceful guise to trade at the towns for the articles they cannot produce in their mountain fastnesses.

The soldiers never dare to go after them, for they could not find them if the Indians did not wish to be found. And when they wish to be found, it is apt to be in places where the soldiers are at such a disadvantage that they are never heard of again.

Now and then a white man has been found to penetrate into these recesses as a friend to these tribes; but only when he has some secret tie that binds him to them. Among the chief of these ties is that of a certain secret society something akin to Masonry, in which the Indians, from Canada to Central America, take a great interest, and in which they perform various fantastic ceremonies.

Among the Pueblo Indians of New Mexico, known as the Zunis, this society is particularly active, and into its ranks, in our time, one white man, at least, has been initiated, the results of whose investigations have been published.

As the caravan of the magician turned into the mountains off the Chihuahua road, Charley Walden began to tell his chief a few things which showed that he belonged to this society and on what he rested his hopes of securing their assistance.

"If the first man we meet belongs to the higher circles, Horace," he said, "I can promise that we receive a cordial reception. If not, we shall be in great danger. But if we stay outside of the mountains we are in still greater danger, and we cannot save ourselves by getting to Queretaro; for before we reach the place we shall be overtaken by that regiment and Brooke will order our murder."

Horace signified his assent to the proposition, by saying:

"I am in your hands, Charley. There are times when my art is the thing to rely on; but just at present it has failed me, and I have to trust to you to save us from our pursuers."

"I will do it," replied Charley, cheerfully. "all you have to do is to follow me. By this time you may be sure we have been seen from the watch stations on the mountains and they will wonder what we mean by coming toward them. I will ride ahead and take my chances. If you never see me again remember that I tried my best to save you and Clara from harm."

His voice choked a little as he said this, and he wrung the hand of his chief; quickened the pace of his horse and rode off up the mountain gully they were ascending.

Upward and still upward the wagon toiled on, till the sun had set and the plain was covered with darkness.

When they had gone about a thousand feet in altitude, the magician ordered a halt, and went to a projecting rock that commanded a view of the plain below him.

All was dark for many miles; but as he looked he saw some twinkling points of light beginning to make their appearance in the direction of El Paso, and saw that they came from the watch-fires of a camp, probably that of the American Regiment on its march to Queretaro. Judging as well as he could, he thought the regiment must be at least fifteen miles in his rear.

He staid a short time on the rock and then returned to his wagons which he conducted up a ravine where they would be sheltered from view from the plain. Here he went into camp for the second time since leaving El Paso, and secured his animals in a position where they would be sheltered from attack, on all sides but the front.

The fires were lighted and the tents spread, after which the magician went to one of the wagons and said in a low voice:

"Clara, you can come forth safely now. The crisis of our life is at hand."

As he spoke, the slight form of the boy who had assisted in the exhibition at El Paso, rose from a couch arranged among the things in the wagon, alighted with the assistance of Doctor Satan's hand, and entered the tent which had just been pitched in the midst of the camp.

This tent was sufficiently luxurious in its appointments to challenge admiration, for the floor was spread with carpets and pillows, in oriental style, and a handsome lamp already burning, hung from the roof of the tent by silver chains.

Now that the boy was near by, one might see that he was, as the reader must have seen, a girl in disguise, and none other than the one who had figured as a bride in the final scene which had shocked Colonel Brooke into a fit.

The dark brown curls that had been worn by the boy under the name of Albert, had been but a skillfully made wig, while the golden locks of the girl were natural.

The face and head were those of the girl called Clara Walden; but the dress was still that of the boy Albert.

Girl or boy, she looked alarmed as she asked him quickly:

"Oh, Horace, what has happened? I thought that the danger was past after you sent off those robbers."

"On the contrary," he answered, "it has only begun. Do you remember, Clara, my telling you of the man, Gideon Scott, who was the chief instrument in—in what we both know of?"

"I do," she responded in a low tone. "But, oh, heavens, Horace, do not say he is here again! If he should accuse you of—you know what—every one would look with suspicion on whatever you said, and we could never secure justice in this world."

"That is just the danger," said the magician quietly. "Listen. So far, this man has not seen me. I tried my best to have him killed to-day, but he has lives like a cat, and escaped. He has gone on his way to Brooke, and if they meet, the two will know what to do. I must secure another disguise, before we meet again. This one has served its purpose. It has shocked Brooke into acknowledging a part of the truth. The next must be one which he and Scott together cannot penetrate."

"And what will it be?" asked the girl, trembling. "Oh, Horace, if I had dreamed of the danger in which you would run, I would rather have left it all undone. You and I, dear, can live together as happily, without what you call justice, as in any other way—"

He checked her sharply with a motion of his hand.

"Not so, Clara. We never could be happy in hiding, and we should have to remain in hiding, all the rest of our lives. This man Brooke has blasted my life and yours. He snatched from my lips the cup of happiness, five years ago; immured me in a prison from which there was no release, and since my escape, I find myself compelled to renounce the name I bear; hide from all my kindred, for fear of being sent back to the same prison, and to skulk through life a fugitive. Not till I can hold up my head with all the rest of the world, can either of us know happiness, and till that day comes the struggle must go on."

"But his power is so great," she faltered. "You cannot hope to harm him here, in a time of war, when he has command of a regiment."

"He had command of a regiment when I first took up his trail," said Horace slowly. "I chased him from place to place, hoping to meet him sword in hand, but he foiled me everywhere. Now, at last, when the war is over, I meet him in another war. I have done what I set out to do, a year ago, I have faced him at last. From henceforth I know the place where he is, and he does not yet know who I am, or at least, if he suspects, he is not sure of anything. Now comes this man Scott, into the plot. He has turned Mormon—"

"Mormon?" echoed the girl with a shudder. "Are you sure of that?"

"I saw him to-day and recognized him through the glass. It is the same man, and he has come here with a band of the Danites to establish a Mormon colony in aid of the Juarists. I did think that our only chance of safety would be in joining the Emperor Maximilian at Queretaro, but Charley has shown me that it is impossible. The American Regiment will catch us before we get there, and our only chance of safety is in fleeing to the mountains, and claiming the protection of the Indians that live round here. Charley himself says he knows some of them, through some Indian society that he joined when he was in New Mexico, and he has gone off, up the mountain, to claim their friendship, and to do what he can for us. I do not disguise from you that his errand is a perilous one, and likely to fail. If it does fail, we shall be in the power of savage Indians, inside of an hour, and shall all be massacred in short order. Now, Clara, are you willing to remain in this camp and take the risk?"

She shivered slightly as she asked:

"And what is the alternative if we do not?"

"Falling into the hands of Brooke or the Mormons," he answered, quietly. "You know best whether we have any mercy to expect from him any more than he from us."

The girl shuddered, as if trying to overcome some nervous feeling, and then said, with a visible effort:

"Better a death at the hands of the Indians than to fall into his hands again. But you will not let me fall into their hands if death will save me. Will you, Horace?"

He shook his head gravely.

"You know I will not. If the worst comes to the worst we can die together, by their bullets or our own."

The assurance seemed to satisfy her, for she smiled at him, and then put her arms round his neck and kissed him solemnly, as if she were taking leave of him for the last time.

"We will die together, Horace," she repeated. "That may be the best way out of this tangle, dear, after all. I do not see where else it can end."

As she spoke they heard the clatter of a stone rolling down the side of the mountain from above, and it fell beside their tent, as if something had been thrown down to attract their attention.

Horace and Clara both stepped out of the

tent, and saw a bright light on the summit of a cliff above the camp, on which stood a group of Indians in full dress, with feathers in their hair, three of them holding torches, while a fourth, with Charley Walden beside him, was looking down at the camp.

Doctor Satan at once hailed:

"What is wanted? Who visits the great medicine by night?"

He spoke in Spanish, and the hail was answered by the Indian who stood by Charley Walden's side.

"Who are you, and why come you into the land of the Toltecas without asking leave?"

The summons was stern and the voice by no means reassuring.

The man of magic answered back fearlessly:

"I am the great medicine-man of the white people, and have come to see your medicine-men. I have sent my messenger before me to claim your hospitality. If you are friends I can make you rule over your enemies. Come down to my camp as friends, and see what I have to show you before you say whether you are friend or foe."

The Indian, who seemed to be a chief, answered at once:

"Thundercloud will come, and woe to the white man if our medicine is stronger than his."

Then the torches were extinguished, and the magician rushed into his tent, saying to Clara, hastily:

"Get ready all the tricks we know. Our lives will depend on the fright we give these savages."

CHAPTER X.

THE TWO MEDICINE-MEN.

THERE was not much time for the magician to arrange his apparatus in the tent, before the Indians, who had hailed from the top of the rock, were seen approaching; and, had he not been well seconded by his assistants, he could have made but a sorry show in the matter. But he had his apparatus made on purpose for use in his business, and by the time the Indian chief, who had called himself Thundercloud, had entered the camp, all was ready. Doctor Satan, in his long robes, was seated at the door of a tent which contained several mysterious stands, with an easel, on which was placed a picture-frame, covered with a curtain.

Thundercloud was a tall and dignified Indian, but he carried no arms, though he was followed by ten men, fully equipped for war, among whom Charley Walden walked, not quite in the character of a prisoner, but evidently watched with suspicion, for he had been deprived of his weapons.

As he got near his friend, he said, in English:

"Got in the wrong box, Horace. If you can't hocus-pocus them, it is all up with the show, and the rest of us. They belong to the society; but doubt me, because I am a white man."

Doctor Satan pretended not to notice what he said, as the Indian chief slowly advanced toward him. He noticed, behind the chief, a man in a fantastic dress, with the skins of all sorts of small animals hung round his neck, in whom he recognized the medicine-man of the tribe, in all probability.

The conjurer had seen Indian medicine-men before, and knew that they were skillful in their art, as regards ventriloquism and some sleight-of-hand tricks. He knew that the first person he had to overawe was this very medicine-man; and therefore, as the chief came close to him, he stretched out the naked sword in his hand, and said solemnly:

"Be not too rash, chief. None but a medicine-man can enter that tent and live. I am the great medicine-man of all."

Thundercloud instantly stopped, with a suddenness that was ludicrous, considering the dignity he usually assumed, and said to the medicine-man beside him:

"Let the Rattlesnake advance, and show the white man his power."

Rattlesnake—as he seemed to be called—strode to the front at once, with a swagger in his air that showed he expected an easy victory over Doctor Satan. He was a short, stout fellow, with a cunning face and a deep voice, which growled out:

"I salute my brother. I am the great medicine-man of the Toltecas, and at my voice the spirits of the dead come forth, and speak to the living."

He was about to enter the tent, when the magician rose to his feet and stretched forth the naked sword, saying solemnly:

"Let Rattlesnake beware. My spirits are more powerful than his, and if he tries to brave them, they will rack his bones with pains, and he will fall to the earth in a fit."

The Indian paused an instant, and the air of assurance left his face; but when he glanced round at his friends, and realized what would be the consequence of defeat, he stiffened up his courage, and answered boldly:

"The spirits of Rattlesnake are the kings of the mountains, and the spirits of the white man

are those of the plain. I will enter the tent, and drive them forth."

Doctor Satan extended his sword once more, saying:

"If Rattlesnake enters that tent, my spirits will rack him with pains, to punish him for his lies."

Rattlesnake laughed aloud, though his face showed that the solemn address had its effect upon his nerves. He stepped forward and entered the tent, going toward the easel. In front of the easel lay a small carpet, right at the door of the tent, and the Indian could not get in without stepping on this or leaping over it, while the door of the tent was so low that, if he did so, he would brush against the curtains.

Rattlesnake stepped on the carpet, and the next moment dropped as if he had been struck by lightning, and lay there, knotted up in a heap, writhing like a wounded snake, and howling at the top of his voice for "help" and "mercy."

The other Indians, who had come with him, were so much astonished at the sudden fall of their medicine-man, that they uttered an involuntary exclamation of awe and fear, while Thundercloud shook like a leaf, as he stared at the writhing form of his trusted medicine-man, who had never before been beaten.

Doctor Satan pointed to the fallen man, and said solemnly:

"My spirits are the rulers of the world. Let the chief own my power, and I will be his friend. Let him declare me his foe, and every man in his tribe will be seized with the same pains that now rack that rash intruder on my domain."

Here the cries of Rattlesnake became so agonizing that they cut short all further converse, and Doctor Satan said aloud in Spanish:

"Let the spirits cease to torture the rash man; but let him remain where he is."

The moment he said it, there was a booming sound, as of low thunder, and Rattlesnake sunk down on the carpet, limp as a rag, but silent, as if completely exhausted.

Doctor Satan proceeded.

"Let Rattlesnake remain where he is. If he attempts to move, I will order my spirits to torment him again. Now let the chief speak. Is he willing to make friends with the great spirit of the white man, or is it war?"

Thundercloud hesitated a moment, and then said slowly:

"The spirits of the white man are very strong, but we are not sure if he be our friend. Even the spirits cannot stop bullets, and my followers are armed."

The magician instantly stepped into the tent, and threw open his breast, saying, sternly:

"Let the men of Thundercloud fire at me, and I will throw back the bullets to them, and make them burst in fire."

The bold challenge took the chief by surprise, and he said:

"If the white medicine-man can do that, I will own his power to be above that of all our spirits. Let Tiger-tooth fire at him."

He addressed a tall Indian who had come with him, and who instantly drew a revolver and fired straight at the white magician. Doctor Satan was seen to make a motion as if catching the bullet, and cast it back at the feet of Tiger-tooth.

There was a bright flash and a sharp report, at which even the stolid Indians started back, while Tiger-tooth, frightened out of his wits for the first time in his life, by his superstition, dropped his pistol, and fell on his knees, saying aloud:

"This is the king of the medicine-men. I will fight against him no more, or we shall all die like dogs."

Thundercloud, on his part, changed countenance, and his voice shook, as he said:

"It is enough. We are willing to be friends with the white medicine-man, if he will let us. We are as children before his power."

Doctor Satan waved his hand patronizingly, and answered:

"That is nothing to what I can do. Let Rattlesnake arise and leave the tent. My spirits are angry with him; for they tell me he is no medicine-man, but a clumsy bungler. Go!"

Rattlesnake heard the words and rose slowly, crawling from the tent on his hands and knees. He was cowed to the inmost parts and showed it plainly. Even when he had got outside the tent he did not dare to rise to his feet, but remained squatted on his haunches, his face full of fear and woe, as he stared at the white magician, as at a superior being from another world.

Then Doctor Satan went to the carpet in front of the easel, and drew aside the curtain which concealed the picture from view. This curtain had been attached to the frame, and hung over the picture itself and nothing more. When it was raised a blank space was discovered to the gazers.

The magician pointed to the frame and said: "Is there a medicine-man in your tribe that can make the faces of the dead appear in that picture, at command, and speak aloud?"

Rattlesnake, seeing that the magician was

looking at him, groaned out, in a voice that showed his terror:

"No, no! It cannot be done!"

"Ask then, oh, Thundercloud," continued the magician, "whom shall I cause to appear on that picture, and speak to you?"

Thundercloud, completely conquered by his fears, stammered:

"I dare not! Let the white spirit do what he will with us."

"Good," said Doctor Satan, promptly. "Then the chief shall see what my power can do with the dead. Let the spirit of the cloud of evening appear and speak to the red-men."

The next moment the Indians uttered a simultaneous grunt of surprise and fear, as the center of the blank space vanished, and the face of a girl, crowned with flowers, appeared in the opening, her eyes moving from side to side, as she surveyed them.

They stared at the naked easel, with its three thin legs, then at the little frame, only large enough to contain the face, and then at each other, in stupid wonder.

That wonder was changed to terror when the magician said:

"Spirit of the evening clouds, whom seest thou here?"

And the face of the girl answered distinctly, in Spanish:

"The chief of the Toltecas and his warriors. Let them beware how they hurt the white magician or their tribe will be swept from the earth by the spirit of death."

The white magician demanded in his turn:

"Who is the spirit of death?"

"Call him, and he will come," said the beautiful face.

The doctor stepped forward to the frame and dropped the curtain over it, saying:

"Does Thundercloud desire to see the spirit of death?"

The chief shivered visibly.

"No, no!" he muttered, brokenly. "He has come before, and we have trembled at his breath. Let us not see him."

Doctor Satan frowned on him.

"None can escape the spirit of death," he said.

"If ye refuse to see him, he will come, none the less, to warn ye what ye have to expect if ye defy me. Let the spirit of death appear."

He stepped forward to the easel as he spoke, with a slow, stately step, while the Indians shuddered and watched him, as if fascinated at the sight, not daring to interfere.

When he withdrew the curtain again a hideous face, black as a coal, looked forth from the midst of the picture, with white streaks across it, and fiery circles round the eyes, causing the nerves of the boldest Indian there to shake.

In a deep voice this grisly face said:

"I am Death. Who calls me?"

The language was Spanish, but spoken in a strange way, as if it were unfamiliar to the spirit.

Doctor Satan answered the face:

"I called thee. What shall be done to the men who are my foes?"

The fiery eyes glared round the circle and rested on Thundercloud, while the deep voice growled:

"Death! death! death! By pestilence and famine! Beware!"

At the same time that the voice spoke, the same low thundering noise, which had heralded the beginning of the mysteries, was heard, and the black face vanished from the frame, the curtain falling, by unseen methods.

When Doctor Satan stepped forward to raise it again, the space it had occupied was empty.

Thundercloud and his friends groaned aloud.

CHAPTER XI.

THE TREATY OF PEACE.

FROM the moment that the black face vanished the conquest of the Indians was complete. Thundercloud and his warriors fell on their knees, and implored Doctor Satan to "show them no more, for fear they would be dead men in the morning." The chief swore, by all his gods, that he would be a good friend to the white man, and help him in anything he desired, to all of which Doctor Satan only replied:

"We care for no help, save in things of earth. Let your men come down from the mountains and guard our camp from foes while we sleep. But let no Indian attempt to enter the circle I shall draw round our place. Is that agreed to?"

Thundercloud, trembling like a leaf, said that it was.

"Then restore to my friend the weapons you have taken from him," said the magician, sternly.

He pointed to Walden as he spoke, and Thundercloud instantly gave orders to one of his men, who brought forward the rifle and pistols of the captive, and handed them to him with demonstrations of the deepest respect.

Walden received them carelessly, as if he had felt no fear all the time, and observed aloud to the Indians:

"You see that the white man, who is a member of the sacred order of the Snake and Sun,

told you no lies. From henceforth we are all friends together."

Thundercloud instantly made an ample apology for having doubted the word of a brother, and retired from the camp in a dazed sort of state, which lasted him all night.

True to his promise, a number of Indians came down from the mountains, and made a camp beside that of the magician, who had made a circle round his tents with a white cord, laid on the top of stakes, in such a manner that it could not be crept under, and that any person who tried to enter the camp by stepping over it could hardly do so without touching it.

One of the younger Indians, who had not seen the wonders of the tent, unwarily came near the cord and laid his finger thereon, when he uttered a loud shriek of pain and surprise and dropped to the ground as if he had been shot. At the same moment a bell rung in the tent of Doctor Satan, and the magician himself came out and called sternly to the Indians:

"Beware what ye do! Awake or asleep, my spirits will punish ye all, if ye dare to lay a finger on my circle."

And as the unhappy young warrior, who had tried the experiment, crept away to relate his marvelous experience, it had such a wholesome effect on the rest that nothing more was done that night.

The young brave had a terrible story to tell, of how, the instant he laid his hand on the white cord he had been seized with mortal tortures, which burned like fire, and that he had seen a blue flame shoot from the tent of the magician as he came out when the bell rung.

The general conclusion of the Indians was much the same as that of the Mexicans and more superstitious Americans in the regiment, that the white magician was in league with the bad spirit, and had the power to kill the whole tribe if he wished. And there is nothing which the Indians fear so much as the "bad spirit," to which they make all their sacrifices, and in honor of which they hold the festivals, to which no white man is admitted, unless initiated, as Charley Walden had been in New Mexico.

Therefore the rest of the night passed quietly round the little camp of Doctor Satan, and when the morning came all his attendants had enjoyed a sound sleep while the Indians were on guard all round them.

No sooner had the first streak of dawn colored the east than Doctor Satan came from his tent, and with his own hands took up the white cord that had surrounded the encampment for the night.

His proceedings were watched with superstitious fear by the Indians, expecting to see him drop, as had the warrior who had unwarily touched it already.

But instead of this, the magician handled the cord as if it had been perfectly innocent, and cast it in a heap at one side, leaving a broad entrance to the camp.

Then he beckoned to Thundercloud, who came forward, crouching as if in mortal terror. The magician smiled and said:

"My red brother need have no fear, as long as he obeys my orders. I come from the Great Spirit, and hold all the tribes in the hollow of my hand. Go to the summit of yonder rock, and tell me whether the soldiers that left El Paso yesterday are yet on the march."

Thundercloud instantly answered:

"My young men have been watching their fires all night, dread spirit, and they are breaking camp, even now."

"Come and show me," said Doctor Satan.

He was attired, now that the day had come, in a costume such as he had worn the day before; his long robes having been assumed for a purpose, which having been served, the magician was better without them, for many reasons, that will appear later.

As he stalked out of the camp, he noticed one of the Indians, who had seen him pick up the rope unharmed, go timidly toward the heap, where it lay on the ground, as if to touch it. The magician turned to Thundercloud, and pointed out the man to him.

"Tell your warrior," he said, "that none but I can touch that rope and live. If he slay himself, I answer for none of his blood."

Thundercloud called out angrily to the warrior, who instantly slunk away, though he cast many a suspicious glance at the camp.

Doctor Satan calmly followed the chief to the top of the rock, which commanded an extensive view of the plain; and Thundercloud pointed out to him, in the distance, certain objects, which the Indian professed to see plainly, and which he said were the soldiers, breaking camp, coming forward on the road.

The magician was unable to see them with the naked eye, but his glass revealed to him a dark mass, with glittering points, here and there, which he took to be the gleam of muskets and which convinced him that Thundercloud was right.

Then he asked the chief:

"On which side are you, in this war in the land?"

Thundercloud answered obsequiously:

"On whichever side the great spirit of the whites wishes me."

Doctor Satan smiled slightly.

"You are an Indian, and they tell me that Benito Juarez is of your race; is it not so?"

Thundercloud admitted that it was, but added:

"Juarez is but a slave-Indian, and we claim no brotherhood with him. We live by the right of our rifles and lances, and ask no favors of any Government."

"That is right," said Doctor Satan. "I wish you to remain on the side of Juarez. Are you willing?"

Thundercloud brightened up at once.

"That is the side on which I belong; though, if the great white spirit had ordered me, I must have supported the usurper."

"Listen, then," said Doctor Satan, slowly. "I have an enemy in that American Regiment, that is coming hither. I wish to enter his camp in the night, or by day, so that he will not know me. Can you help me to a disguise?"

Thundercloud looked puzzled at this, and a little suspicious.

"Why not kill him at once, great spirit? If his arts are more powerful than yours, the Toltecas will follow him, rather than you."

The simplicity with which he avowed his faith was so refreshing that Doctor Satan could not help a smile.

"You mistake," he said. "I do not fear this man; but he is in the midst of men I do not wish to hurt, and if I strike him with my lightnings I may have to hurt others. That is why I wish to be able to go into his camp without his knowing me. You have a medicine-man—a mere bungler—and I wish to take his clothes and go into the camp of the whites as a member of your tribe. Are you willing to let me go, if I leave all my goods behind me?"

Thundercloud hesitated.

"We had thought that we had secured you forever, to be our friend, and never to leave us," he said slowly. "We will give you the handsomest maiden of the tribe, and horses and skins, as much as you shall demand; but we thought you would remain with us, and give us victory over our enemies."

Again the simplicity of the savage excited a smile. He seemed to have a notion that the magician was a god on earth, but that he could chain him to the service of the Toltecas. For a moment Horace, or Doctor Satan, felt a slight thrill of fear at what might be the consequences of placing himself unreservedly in the power of these Indians. For awhile they had been cowed by their superstition, but if they discovered the deception, their vengeance would be exemplary, as he felt assured.

The next minute his coolness returned, and he said to Thundercloud, with a severe air:

"Fool, did you think that I could be chained to the service of any mortal in the world? While I please, I stay with you; but the moment I wish to leave you, I tell my spirits, and they will carry me away, through the air, in a cloud. I have said enough. Let your young men prepare a place for me, where no white man can come to find us. There will I leave my tents and wagons, for safety, while I go to the camp of the soldiers myself. When I return, I will make your tribe rich forever."

The eyes of the Indian gleamed with pleasure at the last words; for he was avaricious, and he asked:

"Will you give us horses and gold and silver, and rifles and all that we desire, great spirit? Will you give us victory over our enemies, in the next battle that we fight?"

"I will give all this and more," said Doctor Satan calmly. "I will make the Toltecas the greatest tribe in the mountains; but if I am to do it, you must obey my orders. Will you do this?"

Thundercloud eagerly promised, and the magician turned away and went back to the camp with him, where he issued orders to the Indians to retire, while his men packed up his baggage.

He stretched the white cord round the encampment once more, to screen his preparations; and Thundercloud, completely deceived, led his men away up the mountain, with the understanding that, when the magician wanted him, a bugle should be blown to summon him.

Doctor Satan told him, to secure a quiet time in packing, that any Indian who attempted to pry into the secrets of the spirits that ruled the camp, would be stricken blind by the unseen powers, and the news, once spread, was sufficient to daunt the boldest.

By this means the attendants of the magician were able to pack up the apparatus by which he had executed his illusions; and when the great lumbering boxes had been loaded into the wagons, and not before, the bugle was blown to summon the Indian guides, and the little caravan set off on its way through the recesses of the mountains, to the ravine in which the Toltecas had made their home, secure from interruption from the Mexicans.

Here at last they were safe from foes in the American regiment; and here the camp was pitched again, in the vicinity of the Tolteca village, while Doctor Satan prepared for his expedition into the camp of his foes.

CHAPTER XII.

WHICH ENDS IN A BARGAIN.

COLONEL GEORGE BROOKE sat in his tent—the only wall-tent in the command—conning the evening roll-call, of the strength of his regiment, which had been just made up by Adjutant Crocker, and talking of the prospects of the campaign.

Around him lay the little shelter-tents of the soldiers, disposed in streets, with the old habit of discipline which they had acquired in the American Civil War, but with frequent gaps in the streets, where the soldiers, in consequence of the fine weather, had failed to set up their little shelters and had bivouacked in the open air.

The pickets had been posted, and the American Regiment was in a state of quiet contentment, consequent on easy marching, delightful weather, and the prospect of brilliant fighting, very different from the savage character of that to which they had been accustomed, at the hands of sterner foes, in the north.

The universal sentiment among the men was, that the battles they were to be engaged in, were to be mere child's play, compared to what they had already undergone individually; and the jollity of the camp was marred by no feeling of apprehension as to the morrow.

Colonel Brooke, however, seemed to be gloomy and despondent that night; for, when he had looked over the report he remarked to the adjutant gruffly:

"Yes, that is all very well as to numbers, but how many of those men are going to *stick*, Crocker?"

"I suppose they all will, colonel," was the reply. "I know we had a good lot to pick from, and chose none but the best men, with the best records. If they won't fight, the deuce is in it all. But they *will* fight, colonel, and do you credit. You needn't fear for them."

Brooke cast an uneasy glance round him. The tent was lighted by a solitary tallow candle of Mexican manufacture, that gave but a poor light and made mysterious shadows in the corners.

"I'm not afraid of the men, as far as fighting goes," he said, "but they are an ignorant lot, and if their superstition gets the best of them they may go to deserting as fast as they enlist. We have nothing to hold them here, you know. It's different from what it was in our war. Then we had a Government on each side, and the men knew it, and fought their best. Now they don't care a cent which side beats; and, by Jove, I don't know that I do, myself, Crocker."

Mr. Crocker drew himself up slightly. He came from the haughty little State of South Carolina, and had been brought up with an almost superstitious reverence for the idea of honor.

"I suppose you are joking, colonel," he said. "I took the oath of allegiance to the Government of President Juarez, willingly, and I don't care to break it. I don't think the men would, either."

"Unless this Emperor Maximilian were to offer a commission to every man in their army and make them all colonels," said Brooke, with a sneering laugh. "Come, come, Crocker, that virtuous tone won't go down with me. You don't care for Juarez or Maximilian, any more than I do, if either offers a good price for changing service. But you needn't fret over it; for neither has done anything of the sort. What I mean is this: that confounded magician fellow has scared the men with his tricks, and I fully believe that, if he were to make his appearance in this camp, they would stampede, thinking him the Evil One in person. Have you heard any talk about him?"

"Crocker looked still more disgusted.

"I don't do much conversing with enlisted men, colonel," he said, in the stiffest of tones; "as for the officers, they think the man a very clever conjurer, and wonder how he managed to frighten *you* in the way he did. That's all, sir."

Brooke bit his lip in vexation.

"He didn't frighten me, as you call it. I was only startled by the resemblance of a figure to a lady I once knew—in fact, to a lady to whom I was once engaged to be married, if you must know. The shock was *there*; not in him. If I could only get a chance at the fellow, I would make him repent having worked on my feelings in the way he did."

"I don't think you will, colonel," said Crocker, dryly. "From what Cortina and that Mormon apostle say, the man has disappeared into the mountains, and the Indians have got him. You can trust them to take care of him, for those Toltecas have a pleasant little way of staking a man, as if he was a spread-eagle, and lighting a fire on his body for fun. They won't scare for a cent at all his hocus-pocus, I guess."

The colonel stirred uneasily in his arm-chair.

"That is true, too; but I shall not think the man safe till I see his dead body. I say, Crocker, how would it do for us to open a parley with these Indians, now that we are right under their rocks. We need have no fears of them with our numbers, unless we go up into their mountains, and they might be glad to make

friends with us. Why not find out whether the man is dead or not?"

Crocker shrugged his shoulders.

"No reason in the world why we shouldn't, colonel. But who is to take the message? I don't fancy the job, for one. These Toltecas are not famous for observing the sanctity of a flag of truce."

"We needn't do anything like sending a flag of truce," replied Brooke, impatiently. "Let us send some of our Indian scouts or some of Cortina's men after them, and get one of their chiefs to come to us. We can make sure of the fellow's death then. They might keep him alive if we don't know something definite."

Crocker seemed to be a little surprised at the words of his chief.

"Look here, colonel," he said, abruptly, "you seem to be mighty uneasy about this man. What is he to you? I did not take service in the Mexican army to help any man's schemes of private revenge, and if you have anything of the sort, I think it is due to the officers of this regiment that you explain to them what you mean."

Brooke flushed purple as he retorted, angrily: "I would have you know, Mr. Crocker, that you took service to obey the orders of your commanding officer, and that if I give an order I expect it to be obeyed."

Crocker drew himself up to his full height as he answered:

"And I am ready to obey them, sir, if they are *lawful* orders. If they are *not*, I shall take the responsibility of disobeying them, and standing a court-martial for my conduct."

Colonel and adjutant looked at each other, and as the eyes of the two men met, the colonel dropped his own after a pause.

"Very good, Mr. Crocker," he said, sullenly. "I thought I had friends in my officers, and especially in my adjutant. If not, I suppose I can stand it as well as you can. Good-evening, sir."

Crocker saluted stiffly and marched out of the tent, while Brooke, left alone to his own reflections, lighted a pipe and chewed the mouth-piece savagely for awhile, puffing out great volumes of smoke to calm his nerves.

Presently he walked to the door of his tent, and looked out.

Before him lay the fires of the camp, and the low, hut-like shelter-tents of the soldiers scattered about. Many of the men had already wrapped themselves in their blankets or Mexican *serapes*, and were sleeping round the dying fires, while a few more were in groups, talking about the incidents of the march, or telling stories. Beyond the camp rose the lofty mountains, in which the scouts had described the trail of the magician's wagons as ending, and beyond which they had not dared to follow them.

As he was watching these thoughtfully a step near him caused him to turn, and he saw the tall figure of the Mormon apostle called Gideon coming toward the tent.

Brooke seemed to know him, for he beckoned the Mormon in, and as the latter entered the tent said to him:

"Well, Scott, have you found out anything yet?"

Gideon Scott nodded.

"I think I have," he said, in a low tone.

"Can any one hear us?"

Brooke looked round him doubtfully.

"Yes, of course they can. The tent is thin and the cook has his quarters right behind it. Come with me and we will take a walk out nigh the pickets. There we can converse undisturbed."

He picked up his sword and revolver and buckled on the belt, after which he led the way from the tent, through the camp, to where the outlines of the sentries could be discerned in the moonlight.

To a challenge from one of the men Brooke answered that he was the commanding officer and gave the man the countersign in order to pass his post. That done, he led the way to a rock just out of earshot of the sentry, and said:

"Now speak low and quick. What have you heard?"

Gideon pulled at his beard meditatively.

"Well, I've heard a good deal, and very little. I am not certain of anything; but, if I am not mistaken, this conjurer that has puzzled you so, is no other than *our man* that I helped to lock up five years ago, Mr. Brooke."

Brooke started violently, ejaculating:

"Impossible! He died and was buried. I saw his grave dug, and looked at his body in the coffin."

"Grave or no grave," retorted the Mormon, obstinately, "it is my belief that it is the same man, Mr. Brooke; and if it is, there is only one thing to do with him—put him in a real grave, with no mistake about his being a corpse."

The intelligence seemed to have stunned Brooke, for he made no reply for nearly a minute, when he said:

"If it be true—and I don't see how it can be—"

"Make up your mind it is true," interrupted the Mormon. "I wasn't there to make sure of things, and that's where the mistake came in.

I always act on the principle of believing the worst and making sure of things. If this fellow is the one we mean, he can hang you and me, or, at least, make things hot for us in the States. Out here it is different, Brooke. We have the whip-hand of him, and we can kill him *sure* if we go about it the right way."

"And what is that?" asked Brooke, gloomily. "I'm sure I don't see what is to be done. I thought the fellow might be some one who knew *our man*—but I never dreamed that *he* was alive. And probably the girl is alive, too."

"Probably," was the tranquil reply. "It makes no difference to me. When you knew me last, I did not know what I know now. The Latter Day Saints are the fellows to fix things to suit themselves, Brooke. I joined them to save my life; but since I've known them I have found out a good many things. What is to hinder my bringing the whole of my men into your regiment, in a body, as a flank company. We are all mounted and armed well. Our fellows are all desperadoes who have killed their man and more than one apiece; and they could do such scouting for you as you could get no one else to do for you. Say the word, and I'll do it. We have a hundred of them at Chihuahua."

Brooke grasped his hand eagerly.

"It is a bargain," he said. "I will muster them in, and with them I have no fears of what this man can do. When can you bring them to the regiment?"

Gideon appeared to be thinking awhile, and then replied:

"In three days from now. In the mean time let him do all he likes. I'll cut his comb when I get all my men together, though I'll admit that he fights a good skirmish behind works."

Brooke rose from his seat on the rock, and extended his hand once more, saying:

"That is a bargain. Take your men out, when you please."

The Mormon wrung his hand and walked away to the camp, answering the challenge and giving the word, as had the colonel; while Brooke remained on the rock, smoking thoughtfully, in full sight of the sentry, for some quarter of an hour more.

Then, as he knocked the ashes out of his pipe, and prepared to return to the camp, he was startled by the loud challenge of a sentry not far off, and perceived a dark figure, in the robes of an Indian, approaching the post.

Brooke quickened his pace toward the camp, and reached it, just as the sentry cried:

"Sergeant of the guard Number Six!"

Obviously the strange Indian wanted to get in, and had been halted in the act.

The cry created a little disturbance in the guard, and Brooke took his way to the place, as the sergeant came running up. They both reached the post at the same time, and found there a strange Indian, in the fluttering robes, rags and skins of a medicine-man, who seemed to be unable to speak anything but a little broken Spanish; but who kept rattling a gourd, and singing a low monotonous chant, in his own language, while he shifted from one foot to the other, as if dancing, and unable to keep still.

"What do you want with us?" demanded Brooke sternly, as the men, recognizing their officer in the moonlight, made way for him.

The Indian made some gibberish answer, with a good deal of pointing to the mountains; but they managed to make out from his broken Spanish that he wanted to see the great chief of the whites, to ask his friendship for the Toltecas.

No sooner did Brooke hear that than he ordered his admission, and led him to his own tent. His envoy was already secured.

CHAPTER XIII.

RATTLESNAKE'S MISSION.

THE eagerness of the colonel to get the medicine-man to his tent was such that he hurried him off without asking any questions in English; being satisfied with what broken Spanish he and the Indian could make out together.

He saw that the man was a short, stout fellow, with a hump-back and a stolid, stupid-looking face, striped with paint in all sorts of fantastic figures, such as medicine-men were in the habit of assuming, though there was a cunning gleam in his eye that showed he was no fool.

The sentries stared after the strange pair in amazement; but the colonel never heeded it as he went on to his tent, and preceded the Indian into it.

When he turned round, he saw the medicine-man looking at him, out of the corner of his eye, from under the long elf-locks that hung down on either side of his broad face.

"How are you called?" asked Brooke in Spanish.

"Rattlesnake," was the answer in the same tongue. "Great snake—great medicine-man—call up the dead—ugh!"

Brooke smiled slightly, but concealed the smile, for fear of offending the Indian, whom it was his policy to conciliate.

"You are a Tolteca," he continued, "and come from their chief. Are you a chief, yourself?"

Rattlesnake shook his head.

"Can you take a message from me to the chief?" asked Brooke.

Rattlesnake nodded.

"Can you answer me some questions?"

Again the Indian nodded.

"Then tell me, have you seen a strange white man in your mountains since yesterday?"

Rattlesnake's eyes glittered at once, and he eagerly answered:

"Yes, yes. I have seen him."

Brooke, equally eager, asked:

"Where and when? Is he alive?"

Rattlesnake laughed with a triumphant leer.

"The fires of the Toltecas are hot," he said, in much better language than he had hitherto used. "The white man was a great medicine man, but Rattlesnake is a greater. We will pick his bones for the feast of the War-God, and make a necklace of his teeth for Thundercloud, our chief."

Brooke rubbed his hands with another smile as he asked:

"Can you make me sure of this?"

Rattlesnake grinned in answer.

"Come to the mountains and you shall see for yourself."

The colonel looked at him suspiciously.

"If I go to your mountains, how am I to know I shall ever get back alive, Rattlesnake?"

Rattlesnake shrugged his shoulders.

"You never would," he replied, coolly.

"The Toltecas allow no white man in their mountains."

Brooke bit his lips. The coolness of the Indian surprised him.

"What became of the men who were with this medicine-man? He had wagons and people."

Rattlesnake made a gesture expressive of scalping, as he said:

"All gone. The Toltecas are great warriors."

Brooke could hardly believe him, though he had no reason to doubt the Indian; but he asked after a pause:

"How am I to know that what you say is true?"

Rattlesnake laughed in his peculiar manner, with a spice of malicious glee, as he said:

"White man must take Rattlesnake's word for it. We have their scalps and their guns and pistols. Here is the scalp of the white man; for Rattlesnake took it himself, when he showed his great medicine and conquered the other man."

And he coolly pulled from his pocket a small tuft of hair, with the skin still attached thereto, which he offered to Brooke.

The colonel could not repress a shudder, and Rattlesnake grinned at the exhibition of feeling, as he added sarcastically:

"White man not like scalp? Tolteca love it."

And he tucked away the hideous trophy in his breast, as if it had been something precious.

Brooke hesitated a little, and then his anxiety to hear of the death of his foe overcame his caution as he asked:

"Could you show me some more proof of the truth of what you say, as to the death of this white man?"

Rattlesnake retorted instantly:

"Is he your enemy?"

Brooke scowled darkly.

"He is my bitterest enemy, and I wish to be assured that he is dead, so that he never can trouble me again."

The Indian pointed toward the side of the tent next to the mountain, saying sententiously:

"Come up there, and see his body."

"I will go if I can take my regiment with me," answered Brooke, as a feeler how far he could go with the Indian.

Rattlesnake grinned again.

"The Toltecas do not like white men in the mountains. The soldiers have come before, but they never went away again. Come of yourself, and the chief may welcome you, for the sake of what you can give us. We desire the friendship of the white soldiers who are to help turn out the stranger from the land of the Aztecas."

Brooke considered a little. There was something in the proposition of the Indian that raised his wish to be assured of the death of the magician; but he did not dare trust himself in the power of the Toltecas. Then an idea struck him, and he asked:

"Why will not your chief come to me? I will guarantee his safety, and he shall go hence when we have done our business. You said that you came here to ask for our friendship. What do you want us to do for you?"

"To give us some guns, and powder, and horses, and blankets, and knives, and swords, and whisky, and anything else that you may choose to bestow," said the Indian, coolly, as if he were making the most ordinary demand in the world.

Brooke was taken aback for a moment by the way in which he spoke; but remembering that he had to deal with an ignorant savage, whose only notion of a white man was something to be begged from, he said, as kindly as he could:

"I am quite willing to give you some presents, but I must see your chief, and be sure that my enemy is dead. Will you take that message to him or not?"

Rattlesnake nodded and was going to the door of the tent when he paused and asked coolly:

"How many guns am I to say you will give for the body of the white magician?"

"Twenty," said Brooke, remembering that he had some condemned muskets that were lumbering up his wagons.

"I will give you twenty guns, fifty blankets, and a barrel of powder for the body of the white magician and those of his men, if they have been killed," he added, making a mental calculation of what he had to spare.

Rattlesnake nodded.

"How much for the girl?" he asked, as he stood by the door of the tent, with a cunning leer on his face.

Brooke started.

"What girl? Was she killed too?"

The medicine-man shook his head.

"We do not kill women. We keep them to cook for our chiefs. You can have her for fifty guns and two barrels of powder."

Brooke bit his lip.

"I do not want her. Let her stay with you. Good-night."

The Indian waved his hand with a dignified gesture, saying:

"Good-night. I will bring the chief, in the morning, to see you at the foot of the mountain. He will have ten warriors with him, and you can bring as many; but take care that you show no treachery."

Then he went away, and Brooke threw himself on his couch and took the first sleep he had been able to snatch, that night, full of all sorts of dreams of triumph.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE TRUCE FLAG.

THE morning dawned over the American Regiment, and the bugles were sounding *reveille* when Adjutant Crocker came to the side of his commanding officer, to tell him that some Indians were signaling the camp, from the rocks at the foot of the mountain, and that it looked as if they wanted a parley.

Crocker's manner was stiff but respectful, as if he had not forgotten his little passage of arms with his chief, the night before; but Brooke showed no traces of the stiffness, as he roused up and said:

"All right, Crocker, my dear fellow. I know who they are. And, by the by, Crocker, think nothing more of what we said, last night. I was not quite myself, on account of something that had happened; and I hope you won't mention the difference between us."

Instantly mollified, the generous young adjutant exclaimed:

"Of course not, colonel. Certainly not, sir. Shouldn't think of such a thing, you know. Shall I signal the Indians to wait for you?"

"No need," returned the colonel hastily.

"They are there by appointment, through that spy that came in last night; and if we treat them rightly, Crocker, they will prove very useful as scouts."

"Very true, colonel," said the adjutant, glad to be on good terms once more with the man in whose confidence he necessarily was, to a great extent. Then Colonel Brooke hastily threw on his hat, as he buckled his sword-belt and sallied out, to see the Indians whom he had summoned, and who had come, true to their appointment.

He went out of the camp and saw a group of Indians, with their finest feathers on, standing on the top of a spur of rock, that jutted out into the plain at the foot of the mountain.

This rock was about six hundred yards from the camp; and Brooke, ordering the sergeant of the guard to follow, with a dozen men, walked toward the rock, till he had got to a point midway between it and the tents, where he halted.

Taking his handkerchief from his pocket, he placed it on the top of his sword, and waved it to the Indians.

The chief of the red-men, to show that he understood the motion, took a white flag and raised it on top of a lance, which he waved to and fro; but showed no symptom of advancing from his rock.

Brooke hesitated a little; and then, giving a muttered order to his sergeant, to see that his men "kept their eyes skinned for treachery on the part of the Indians," he walked slowly forward, till he was within some hundred yards of the rock, when he halted again and waved his white flag.

Glancing back, after he had done this, he saw that his own men had come to the edge of the camp, watching the scene, and evidently not quite easy in their minds; for he saw the gleam of arms among them, as if they were ready to run out and open fire on the Indians, at the least provocation.

The sight encouraged him, for he knew that he was a favorite with the men, on account of his bluff ways and apparent sincerity of purpose, as shown by a good deal of swearing, and insisting on getting the best of provisions, from the towns, through which their route lay, by forced requisition.

"They won't let these red savages get away with me," he muttered to himself, as he turned round toward the Indians again, and discovered that the chief of the red-men was descending

the rock to meet him, as if satisfied with the concession already given.

Brooke waited till the savage had reached the plain, and met him at the foot of the rock, on the level ground.

He saw before him a tall, dignified-looking chief, in full dress, with a handsome plume of eagle-feathers, that fell down his back, in the Indian war-bonnet.

The face of the chief was grave and dignified, the most remarkable feature being a very large, hooked nose, that gave him a severe and repellent aspect.

Brooke saluted him courteously, and inquired in Spanish:

"Is this the chief Thundercloud?"

"I am called Thundercloud, and at my voice the earth quakes," was the modest reply, in slow, measured tones.

Brooke looked round and saw, close to the chief, the humpbacked medicine-man with whom he had conversed the night before. He beckoned to Rattlesnake and said:

"That is the man that came to my camp last night and promised me that he would show me the body of my enemy. Are you ready to show it to me?"

Thundercloud shrugged his shoulders slightly as he retorted:

"Rattlesnake told me that you would give us twenty guns and a barrel of powder, with blankets for fifty men, for the sight you wish to see. Have you got them here?"

Brooke bit his lips. Evidently the Indian did not trust him far.

"I have given my word that if you show me the bodies I will give you the guns," he said, sharply. "I am the big chief of the soldiers, and no man doubts my word."

Thundercloud looked at him with a quiet scorn that actually made the white man shrink, in spite of his fancied superiority in civilization, as he said, slowly:

"I am the chief of the Toltecas. Send one of your young men for the guns, and the blankets and the powder. I want them. The Toltecas trust no white man in their mountains. They are the kings here. If you think they are not, send for your whole regiment to come here, and we will take the guns and blankets for ourselves."

As he spoke, Brooke, who was beginning to get uneasy at the tone used by the savage, glanced round and saw what surprised him.

He stood within easy gunshot of the rock from which Thundercloud had descended, and the shining barrels of more than a hundred muskets appeared to be leveled on him from the edge of this rock, each with the face of an Indian behind it. He had walked right into a trap, and had not noticed it.

Thundercloud appeared to be quite conscious of the state of affairs, for he grinned urbanely as he noticed Brooke's glance, saying:

"The white soldier can look all he wants. If he brings all the soldiers he has we can count man for man with him. Let him be wise, and send for the guns and blankets to pay us our tribute."

Brooke scowled, but could not help himself. He hastily tore a leaf out of his pocket-book, and scribbled a note on it to his quartermaster, in which he told him to send on a list of articles which his colonel named for him:

"Twenty of those condemned muskets of the Belgian pattern, which we had issued at El Paso, and which none of the men would take; fifty Mexican blankets and a barrel of that blasting-powder which we had in the railroad stores at Matamoras."

This note he sent off by one of his men, and gave the man a whispered direction to "tell the men that their colonel was in danger of being shot down if he stirred, and that he did not expect to get out of the scrape alive, if any rash move was made by the soldiers."

The man, thoroughly frightened at what he had seen, (for not being an old Indian-fighter, the sight of the dark faces behind the rocks had dismayed him), took the note and hurried away as fast as he could walk, being only prevented from running by the fear of ridicule, in the face of two hundred Indians and the whole American Regiment looking on, and ready to applaud or hiss courage or cowardice, as the case might be.

When he had gone Thundercloud observed with a smile of as much suavity as a high-born prince of the best blood in Europe could have displayed to cover over a disagreeable interlude:

"That is well. Now, if the white chief would like to see his foe, I am ready to show him, if he will trust to the honor of Thundercloud. I have trusted to the honor of my white brother in not looking at the note he sent his friends."

"But you could not have read it if I had given it to you," said Brooke, with something of a sneer in his tones, he being of a brutal nature which delighted in rudeness.

Thundercloud smiled and took from his breast a pocketbook and pencil, with which, much to the astonishment of Brooke, he wrote:

"The señor must not think that the chief of the Toltecas, who has graduated at the University of Mexico, is the same as a wild Indian or a peon of the plain."

He handed the leaf he had torn off to the colonel, who glanced at it with manifest amazement, and whose manner instantly became more respectful as he said:

"Chief, I apologize for my rudeness. But I had no idea that you had been to college."

"The chiefs of the Toltecas are always open to the wisdom of the white man," said Thundercloud, sententiously. "Will the white chief come and see the body of his foe, or does he fear to trust me?"

Brooke hesitated a moment, and then said:

"Well, no; I am not exactly afraid, chief, but I don't want to be taken captive, like a fool."

The chief's lip curled in a smile of quiet scorn.

"If I wished to take you prisoner," he said, "I should do it here and now. For you are in my power the moment I raise my hand. Look at the muzzles of the rifles that cover you, and then say if you are in more danger going with me or staying here."

Brooke looked round him and shivered slightly.

The Indians, who had been barely visible before, had risen into full view with their rifles pointed at him at the gesture of their chief.

Thundercloud allowed a low laugh to ripple over his frame as he said, quietly:

"You see where you are if I give the signal. Now, will you come with me and see the dead body of your foe or not?"

Brooke hesitated a moment more, and then shame compelled him to say to the chief, resignedly:

"You have got me, anyhow, and I may as well trust you. I will go with you, if you like. But it must not be too far."

Thundercloud pointed to the rock from which he had descended.

"I have had him brought down there behind the rock on purpose to show you," he said, "but you were afraid, and made me come out here. I will take you there, and none shall make you afraid any more. But your men must stay here. I cannot answer for my Indians if they see more than one white soldier in a place where no soldiers are allowed under the laws of the Toltecas."

Again Brooke hesitated as he thought of the fact that he must put himself unreservedly at the mercy of the chief; but his curiosity overcame his discretion at last, and he asked:

"But will you surely show me mine enemy, dead? Will you let me assure myself that it is the same man, the white medicine-man who had the wagons and the girl? Can I be sure that I see him and that you will let me return to mine own unharmed?"

Thundercloud waved his hand.

"A chief of the Toltecas has given his word. I will show you the man you hate. You shall see his dead face, and put your hand on his cold body to feel if the heart beats or not. Is that enough?"

Brooke nodded, and the Indian chief said gravely:

"Come, then, and you shall see all I have said."

CHAPTER XV.

THE DEAD MAGICIAN.

THUNDERCLOUD waved his hand graciously as he spoke, and turned to go, while Brooke told his men to wait for him, as he followed the Indian. The chief had come out, attended by ten warriors, all in full dress and armed heavily, though he himself carried nothing but a highly ornamented pipe, in his hand.

Brooke gave a slight shiver, which he could not repress, and then walked after the chief, holding his head up, and trying to look as if he cared nothing for what he was doing, though his heart was beating like a trip-hammer.

Thundercloud turned round the edge of the tall rock; and Brooke, following him, found himself in presence of more than a hundred Indians, quite distinct from those who had lined the top of the rock, and all standing with rifles in their hands, ready to sally forth into the plain.

They were massed at the foot of a little gorge in the mountain, the entrance to which was covered by the tall rock; and all the way up this gorge Brooke could see men, crouched behind bushes and rocks, with arms in their hands, so thickly that he saw that, if he had tried to charge, even with his whole regiment, he would have had them cut to pieces, almost without a chance of fighting.

Thundercloud dropped back beside him and watched him curiously, as he scanned the forces at the disposal of the chief.

"The white soldier sees that, if Thundercloud had wished to fight, he could have taken every soldier, and dried his scalp in our fires," said the chief, in his deep tones.

Brooke nodded, with another slight shudder, and dropped the subject, which made him feel more helpless than he had before.

Thundercloud led the way into the midst of his warriors, who drew apart as he came, eying the white man solemnly.

They did not seem exactly hostile, but far from friendly; and the colonel felt much in the

position of a lamb, in the midst of a pack of wolves, among whom he had dropped unawares. The chief led him up the gorge, a little way, to where a group of Indians was gathered, in front of a tepee or lodge, all fully armed. Here the Tolteca paused and said:

"Within that tepee lies your foe. Are you prepared to see him?"

Brooke nodded eagerly, and his old feeling of triumph enabled him to stifle his fears, as he went toward the tepee, when he was warned, by the touch of Thundercloud on his arm, that he was going too fast, as the chief said slowly:

"Before you enter that tent, you must promise that, whatever you see, you say nothing aloud, unless I give you leave. The spirits of the dead are all round us here; for this is the burial-ground of the Toltecas, for many centuries."

"I will say nothing," protested the colonel, and Thundercloud, with a wave of his hand, dismissed the guard from the door of the tepee, the men retiring to either side, as the chief and Brooke walked up.

The tepee was made of bull-hides; buffalo being scarce and rare in Mexico, and the herds of the rich haciendas being much more convenient for the purpose of securing skins.

Thundercloud raised the flap which did duty for a door, and preceded the colonel into a dark space, lighted only by a small hole in the roof, from which curled the aromatic smoke of a small fire of pine-cones, which diffused a balsamic odor through the interior of the tepee.

Squatted in the midst of the tent was a man in the dress of a medicine-chief, but different from Rattlesnake, who had remained outside, as if not worthy to follow his chief.

This medicine-man, the moment Brooke entered the tepee, raised a low chant, rattling a gourd in one hand, and, with the other, beating on a small drum that lay on his knees as he squatted there.

For a moment the colonel could not see what else the tent contained, in the dim light; but, as his eyes grew accustomed to the gloom, he saw, by the side of the Indian, a body, laid out, attired in the garments in which he had seen Doctor Satan on the platform at El Paso, with the same face, but unmistakably that of a dead man now.

The eyes of the colonel glistened with joy and hate combined, as he looked down, and he sunk into a fit of musing, from which he was roused by Thundercloud asking him:

"Is the man dead? Look at his scalp."

Brooke peered closer, and saw that the whole of the upper part of the scalp had been torn off, leaving a hideous mass of flesh, from which the blood had fled in death, leaving the scalp still more repulsive than if it had been fresh, on account of the clots of dried blood.

He shuddered slightly, and Thundercloud laughed, as he said:

"The white chief does not love scalps. Toltecas like nothing so well in all the world, except the pleasure of hearing a white man howl, as he did, under the torture."

"Did you torture him to death then?" asked Brooke, almost in a whisper.

The chief grinned sardonically.

"He died by inches, and we had to sew the pieces together, and put them in his clothes, to enable you to recognize him. Look at his face, and that will tell the story."

Brooke looked closely, and saw from the lines of intense agony in the pinched white features, that Thundercloud had spoken truth.

"The man is dead enough," he said, almost with a sigh. "You shall have the guns and powder I promised you, at once."

Then he turned to leave the tepee, feeling sick at the stomach at the sight he had just witnessed when the chief said:

"Feel his hands and see if he be alive yet. Nothing like being sure of a thing, you know."

Brooke shuddered violently, and backed away, saying hurriedly:

"No, no, it is not necessary. I do not want to do it. The man is dead enough. I hated him while he was alive; but let him rest now."

Thundercloud laughed, a low, gleeful laugh, as if he enjoyed the evident horror of the other.

"You white men do not even know how to hate. If he had been my foe I would have cut out his heart, to roast. But you cannot do that now, because I ate it, last night, for supper."

Brooke controlled his growing nervousness to say:

"I take it all for granted. But what became of his men?"

"Do you wish to see them too?" inquired Thundercloud, with an appearance of great solicitude.

Brooke hesitated.

"I should like to, of course. Are they not here?"

Thundercloud shook his head.

"I am sorry I cannot oblige my white friend; but they are all in the same case as this man before you. Some are a mile away, up the hills; others have been sent to the secret temple of the War-God, to be sacrificed, as our fathers sacrificed, before the white men came with Malinche, to teach us about our Lady of Guadalupe, and a lot of stuff that the peons of the plain believe,

but which we have always laughed at, as it deserves. But if my white friend wishes to see them I can take him with me. But in that case, I cannot guarantee his safety; for my men might get uncontrollable, if they saw him, where no white man has ever been allowed to come before."

Brooke hastily held out his hand saying:

"It is not necessary. I take your word for the rest. But—but—was there not a girl with them?"

Thundercloud laughed, in the same low gleeful way in which he had referred to the horror he had spoken of, before.

"There was a girl. Do you wish to see her? You can, if you will."

Brooke hesitated a short time.

"I should like to see her," he said at last. "Not that I want her, but to be sure of what you say. Is she dead too? Rattlesnake said that she had been kept alive, for some purpose or other."

Thundercloud interrupted him, with an abruptness that was in strong contrast with the courtesy he had shown hitherto.

"The girl is alive. She is a captive at the temple of the War-God, and will be kept there, for a sacrifice, when the time is ripe for the death of a girl like her. Do you wish to see her? I will have her brought to you, if you do."

Brooke shuddered again as he said:

"No, no, that is not necessary—but at the same time, if I could see her, I could know whether I—I—"

Thundercloud interjected the question:

"Whether she were dead or alive?"

Brooke admitted, by the motion of his head, that this was the case, and the chief continued:

"What was the girl to you?"

Brooke shuddered at the question; but something in the position in which he was, compelled him to answer the Indian, without any paltering with the truth:

"She was once going to be married to me; but I fancied she had died on her wedding-day. That is all. If I could see her alive, I should know if it were the same, or if I had been deceived by this dead man, here, when he showed me her picture, or something of the sort, at El Paso, a few days ago."

Thundercloud nodded sagaciously.

"You shall see the girl. She shall be brought here for you to see and speak with, face to face. Come forth from the tent, and Rattlesnake shall call her, with his charms."

He led the colonel from the tepee, and when Brooke regained the open air, he found that the Indians, who had thronged the gully in which stood the tepee, had disappeared, as if they had sunk into the ground. He rubbed his eyes doubtfully as he looked round; but there was not a sign of a single savage left, save Thundercloud, who stood beside him as if enjoying his surprise, and Rattlesnake, who leered at him with his cunning, elf-like face, as the chief spoke to the medicine-man apart, in their own language.

When the chief had given his orders, the medicine-man rattled his gourd and began a song, which was echoed from within the tent by the other medicine-man, with the same accompaniment of the throbbing drum and frequent grunting chorus.

This song lasted for a few minutes, at the end of which time the chief spoke to Rattlesnake again, and the medicine-man nodded, saying something, which brought from Thundercloud the explanatory words, to Brooke:

"Rattlesnake is a great medicine-man, and he has called the girl. Go into the tepee, alone, and you can see her."

Brooke stared at him doubtfully; but, the Indian repeating the invitation, the colonel raised the flap of the tepee and looked in. To his amazement, the other medicine-man had vanished, taking with him the ghastly body of the slain Doctor Satan; and the interior of the tepee was empty, save for a female figure, which stood in the center, attired in the same robes that had greeted his gaze on the platform at El Paso. Brooke entered the tent, and the girl's voice said, as it had said at El Paso:

"George Brooke, confess thy crime! Confess! Confess!"

CHAPTER XVI.

THE REGIMENT REFUSED.

BROOKE could hardly believe his eyes and ears as he saw and heard, in broad daylight, the girl he had fancied dead.

The interior of the tepee was dark, for the hole at the top seemed to have been stopped up, and the girl stood in the very darkest recess, but a flood of light seemed to emanate from her white robes, making her visible.

The colonel, in a choked voice, faltered:

"Clara Walden, in God's name tell me, are you alive or dead? I have mourned you as dead, so long, that I can hardly believe you are alive in reality."

The girl answered him in the same voice:

"George Brooke, dead or alive, I call on you to confess your crime. Repentance can atone for the past, but death is nigh, in a form you know not."

The bewildered man made a step forward to

get nearer her, when he felt a thrill pervade his frame, beginning at the foot, which he had placed unawares on a skin rug, in front of the girl. It darted through him, making every muscle quiver with agony, and he hastily withdrew his foot, hardly able to stand as he did so, recognizing in the thrill the touch of a powerful electric battery.

"Clara," he gasped, "tell me, at least, are you alive, and do you forgive me for what I did? You know how I loved you—"

Then he stopped and looked at the girl, who began to fade away before his eyes in the darkness, till he could see the heavy folds of the hides in the wall of the tepee, through her figure, as it receded from his view.

But even while it faded the same voice said:

"Dead or alive, George Brooke, thou wilt never know, till it be too late, if thou dost not repent and confess thy guilt."

Brooke clasped his hands, exclaiming in tones of anguish:

"Clara Walden, I will confess everything if you will only say you forgive me for the past. Ah! She is gone!"

For, all in a moment, the girl had vanished into thin air, as she had done at El Paso, while her voice, seeming to come from the earth beneath, repeated the words:

"George Brooke, confess thy guilt! Confess! Confess!"

Then the horror-stricken colonel heard steps and voices outside the tent, and a number of Indians made their appearance round Thundercloud, jabbering excitedly to each other in their own language till the chief called to Brooke:

"Come forth, come forth! Your men are advancing, and if a shot is fired by them it will be the worse for you!"

Thus recalled to the presence of real danger, which he had forgotten in his momentary agitation, Brooke came forth from the tepee, and was hurried away down to the rock, and thence into the plain, to desery the whole of the American Regiment advancing in the rear of three wagons, which were being driven up to the Indians, as if the soldiers had become alarmed at his long absence and feared treachery.

Thundercloud led him out into full view, and said quickly:

"Order your men back or it will be the worse for all of you."

Brooke ran out into plain sight, and waved his white flag, as a signal for the regiment to stop. He was seen and greeted with a loud cheer, while the regiment stopped its advance, the wagons alone continuing their progress to meet him.

Crocker rode by the side of the leading wagon, and with him were the Mormons, who had come with Gideon, their rifles ready for instant use, as they came on.

Thundercloud pointed to them and said to Brooke:

"Send them back or there will be trouble."

Brooke knew that well enough, for he had seen that at least five hundred Indians were close at hand, in a strong position, with their rifles leveled over the rocks to steady their aim.

He waved his flag warningly to the Mormons to stop, and as they did not heed the signal, he shouted aloud:

"Mr. Crocker, halt that train on your life! Do you want to see me murdered at once?"

The adjutant heard something and understood that his chief was halting him for some reason. The wagons pulled up at a word from him, and he rode forward alone to meet his commander, when Brooke exclaimed, agitatedly:

"Bring up the presents as quick as you can, and let us get out of this." The red-men have got us in a trap, and the whole regiment is not enough to charge that rock. Bring up the presents at once."

Crocker saw that something was wrong with his chief, from the way in which he spoke; so he made no objection, but turned his horse and beckoned on the wagons, which came up at a trot, the Mormons obeying the signal to remain behind.

When they were up, Thundercloud said something in his own tongue to his men, some fifty of whom suddenly made their appearance from behind the rock and ran to the wagons, which they proceeded to search with an avidity that was destined to be disappointed, as the excited jabbering and angry looks, directed at Brooke plainly showed.

Presently Thundercloud strode up to the colonel to say, fiercely:

"You promised me guns, and these are shams, with the mark of the Government condemnation on them. Your blankets are thin, and your powder is not fit to put in a gun. Get you gone with your presents, and take care that the Toltecas do not pay you a visit in your camp that will make you repent your treason. Think yourself lucky we do not take you and these men near by and carry you off. Away with you, before my men get angry!"

The colonel was not by any means a coward, but he had seen so much of the power of the Indians in his brief excursion behind the rock that he was demoralized for the time. Besides this, there was something in the vision of Clara Walden that he had just seen, and the sudden and

inexplicable disappearance of the girl in an Indian tepee, with no machinery to account for an illusion, that Brooke's sense of the reality of things was sadly shaken for the time being, and he felt himself only too anxious to escape from the neighborhood at any price.

As Thundercloud menaced him, and shook his fist in the face of the white soldier, Brooke fairly turned tail and fled, followed by his adjutant, while the Toltecas raised a howl of derision and fired some random shots after the white men, which provoked a volley in return from the white regiment, though it was so far out of range that the bullets fell short and whistled harmlessly round the feet of the horses in the wagons.

This volley provoked a general rush-out of the Indians, who showed themselves on the rocks in all directions above the place of meeting in such numbers that the American Regiment, which had pluck enough to fight any amount of Mexicans, actually stopped short and fell back out of range in some confusion, followed by the scornful yells of the Toltecas, who saw the flight and defied the soldiers to come back.

The wagons that had been the cause of the outbreak were left behind perforce, the drivers dismounting from their mules and running for dear life. The Toltecas, on their part, did not seem to have such animosity against the white men that they could pursue them far, so within ten minutes the fuss was over and Brooke safe for the time.

Out of gun-shot from the rocks, the regiment was re-formed, and the colonel made a short address to his officers, in which he told them of the forces he had seen, and of his conviction that the regiment, if it had penetrated behind the rocks at the mouth of the ravine, must have been cut to pieces.

Of the body of the dead magician, and of the reason he had ventured into such danger, he said not a word, but ordered the march to be resumed; and the Mormon chief, who had been waiting for leave to depart, left them, when they halted for the noon meal, and rode away toward the northwest, where he had told Brooke his comrades were in waiting for him.

The regiment took up its march after dinner, in somewhat gloomy spirits; for the men, after what they had seen of the Indians, began to think that the fighting, even in Mexico, might not be quite as easy as they had expected; and it was said that the Mexican emperor had a good many Indian warriors in his service, who were the best soldiers in his army.

The resolute attitude of the Toltecas had been a revelation to the officers of the American Regiment; and they had settled down to their work, with the conviction that it was not to be so easy as they had imagined at first.

That night they camped in a plain, within sight of the lights of Chihuahua, though these were so far away that their guides told them they would be lucky if they reached the city before sunset of the next day. The camp was made, and the guards set; Brooke sleeping soundly, his mind at ease on the subject of the dead magician.

Nevertheless, at midnight, when everything was dark, and only the sentries awake, the colonel was roused from his slumbers by a tap on the shoulder; and looking up, beheld Doctor Satan, standing by his bedside, looking down at him, with his sarcastic smile.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE MIDNIGHT VISIT.

For a moment the half-wakened colonel was too much amazed and demoralized to do aught but lie, staring wildly at his midnight visitor. The great Napoleon has said that "no courage is so rare as two-o'clock-in-the-morning courage," and Brooke was not one of the few men who possess it. He stared at Doctor Satan, sweating at every pore, and trembling so that the bed shook, while the magician, with his sarcastic smile continued to look down at his victim, without a word to relieve his embarrassment.

Doctor Satan was clad in a Mexican dress, only differing from that of an ordinary cavalier in the fact that it was black all through; unrelieved by a touch of color, of any kind whatever.

His white face, with its black mustache and brilliant black eyes, alone relieved the darkness of his dress; and as Brooke stared at him, the superstition he had vainly tried to smother, so far, came over him in a wave, till the magician said, in a low deep voice:

"George Brooke, confess thy crimes!"

Brooke tried to lift his head a moment, and then made a discovery that frightened him still more than he had been before.

He lay on his back in the camp-bed, and some strong bands had been fastened to his arms and legs, as he lay asleep, fastening him down to the frame of the bed, while another had been laid across his throat and prevented him from moving his head, save from side to side, with the risk of choking ever before him.

This discovery completed his terror; and he tried to speak, his voice sounding in a husky whisper as he faltered:

"What do you want with me?"

Doctor Satan smiled sarcastically as he asked:

"Do you know who I am yet, George Brooke?"

The colonel tried to answer, but could only whisper:

"I am not sure, but I think you must be—"

"Who?" asked the magician sternly. "Answer truly."

"Horace—Horace Arnold," gasped the other, as he lay there, powerless to move, staring up at his relentless foe.

Doctor Satan smiled again, with the same sarcastic meaning, as he said slowly:

"Your memory is good, sir—better than it was. Now, will you confess your crime against me, or not?"

Brooke was about to answer, when the clash of arms was heard outside the tent, as the sentry brought his musket to a "port," and they heard his voice challenging:

"Who goes there?"

"Relief," was the answer, and the steady tramp of men approached the tent, while the usual formula of asking for the countersign was observed, and muttered voices showed that the new man was taking orders from the old one.

Doctor Satan, the moment the voices came near, placed his hand on the throat of the colonel as he lay, and whispered:

"Attempt to cry out and it will be the worse for you."

Brooke lay still till he heard the colloquy between the sentry and his successor almost at an end, when he suddenly shouted:

"Help!"

The moment he had done so the hand of the magician closed on his throat, and he was unable to utter another cry.

But the first had attracted attention, and the magician looking round as he stood by the bedside, heard steps approach the tent, and a sharp rap on the canvas outside, while a voice asked:

"What is it, colonel?"

"Nothing," replied Doctor Satan, in a low voice. "Only a dream."

Then there was another short silence, as the man outside stood by the canvas listening, while Doctor Satan kept his hand on Brooke's throat, compressing it so that he could not have cried out had he dared to make the effort.

"You can go," presently said the magician, in the same low tone. "It is all right. I had a bad dream and cried out. What time is it?"

"Nearly morning, sir," replied the man outside. "The last relief is on now before reveille."

"All right," said Doctor Satan, calmly. "You can go on."

Then they heard the steps of the man receding, and presently the relief resumed its march, and nothing was left but the new sentry, in front of the tent, who paced his beat in silence.

Then the magician released the throat of the colonel, and said, in a low, fierce whisper:

"Lucky for you, sir, that your cry was not heard. For the last time, will you confess your crime against me or not?"

But Brooke, who had had time to think, while he lay there, had resumed some portion of his native courage, as he realized that his foe was not the supernatural being he had thought, but flesh and blood like himself.

Feebly, but with sullen energy, he answered:

"I have nothing to confess."

The magician compressed his lips, as he answered:

"Very good then. The time will come when you will. In the mean time remember this: I shall be on your track when you least expect it, and you can never kill me till justice is done. You have tried, with all the chances in your favor; but nothing can shield you from me now. When you think yourself safest is the time that you will see me. For the present I go. Try to cry out now if you dare."

With that he drew from his pocket something wrapped in a handkerchief, which he placed over the mouth and nostrils of the helpless soldier.

Brooke tried to avoid breathing, but could not, and the faint, sickly odor of chloroform penetrated his nostrils speedily, making his head swim till he lost consciousness. The last thing he saw of the magician the dark eyes were bent on him, with the same menacing smile, and then all was dark again, till he woke with a splitting headache, to find himself on his bed, the bands on his arms and legs gone, his body free to move as he would.

With a confused recollection of what had taken place, he raised himself on his elbow and saw that the light of day was coming in through the thin canvas of the tent, which was empty of anything but what had been there when he lay down to sleep the night before.

He rose to his feet, staggering, with a dizzy feeling that he could not overcome, and managed to clear his brain with a dash of cold water just as the trumpets of the regiment sounded reveille.

The familiar blast roused him, and the whole camp was soon alive; the voices of the sergeants calling the roll in the streets. Brooke lay back on his bed and listened to them with a sense of companionship he had never felt before. The whole of the vision of the preceding night seemed to him too horrible to be real, and he was re-

lieved inexpressibly, when the sharp voice of Crocker was heard at the door of the tent saying:

"Awake, colonel?"

"Ay, ay; come in, Mr. Crocker," said Brooke, hastily.

And in came the adjutant, trim and soldierly as ever, for Mr. Crocker made a point of shaving himself at night, and always presenting a neat appearance when he reported the result of roll-calls.

Brooke listened to him as he made his formal report, with a sense of lively satisfaction, and when it was finished asked:

"Have you been to the guard-house yet?"

"No, sir; but the officer of the day is waiting to give his report as soon as you wish it," was the reply.

"Send him in at once, Crocker," said Brooke, hastily. "Something has happened during the night which is unaccountable. Send him in."

Crocker looked at his chief a moment as if he feared that the colonel was ill, but made no remark and wheeled round to go. Ten seconds later the tall form of Captain Pickett, an old comrade of Brooke, made its appearance, with the red sash over his shoulder, that indicated his office, as he said:

"Come to report, sir. All quiet all night."

Brooke stared at him as if amazed.

"All quiet, you say? Has nothing suspicious happened during the night, sir?"

Captain Pickett looked surprised.

"Nothing that I have heard, sir. Has anything happened that you ask me such a question?"

Brooke sat up in bed, rubbing his eyes.

"Either your men keep careless watch, Pickett, or I am going crazy. And I don't think I am. A man got into my tent last night and chloroformed me. He was here as the last relief went on, and I called for help; but no one came."

Pickett seemed to be unfeignedly amazed as he said:

"A man in your tent, colonel? Excuse me; but it can hardly be possible. The guards had strict orders to admit no one into the camp, and I was on my feet myself most of the night."

"Nevertheless, a man was here, and had me tied down, in my bed, while he threatened my life," said Brooke, emphatically. "I shouted for help as they changed the sentry."

Pickett wheeled round instantly.

"I'll find out that in a minute, colonel," he said, curtly. "I know who was on here all night, and I'll have both the sentries up to see you. Will that do, sir?"

"Just the thing," said Brooke; and then he fell back on his bed, feeling sick at the stomach from the reaction of the chloroform, and waited till the officer of the day reentered the tent, with two soldiers, who looked scared at the summons to the colonel's presence, expecting to be blamed for something.

Brooke turned to them to ask eagerly:

"Which of you men went on in the last relief?"

"I did, colonel," said one; a stout, rather stupid-looking fellow from Florida. "I relieved Short hyer, and the corp jest took me off to come and see yer honor."

"Then you must have heard a cry for help," said Brooke, eagerly. "Why didn't you come into the tent at once, some of you?"

The Floridian stared at him with the expression of hopeless stupidity which comes over a Southern "Cracker" when confronted by a problem too hard for his mind, as he said:

"Idunno, cunnel. Corp Stanley he went, and he told us how you said 'twere only a dream and to leave ye alone. 'Twarn't no biz of ours, cunnel, ye know."

Brooke turned impatiently to Short, the man who had been relieved.

"Did you hear nothing?" he asked. "I shouted for help as loud as I could, and some one came to the door of the tent. Who was it?"

"Corporal Stanley, sir," was the reply, in a brisk tone that showed the man to be a person of more intelligence than the Floridian.

The accent was that of a Northern man, also, and Brooke asked him:

"Where do you come from and where does the corporal come from?"

"I come from New York and Corporal Stanley is from Vairmount," said Short, promptly.

"If ye want to know, cunnel, why we didn't come in, corp said as he was much inclined to do it, but your honor said plainly that he was to go away and that it was all only a dream. He didn't like to take the liberty. That's all, sir."

Brooke looked at the two men hesitatingly for a few moments and waved his hand, saying:

"You can go, both of you. That is all."

"What could it have been, then?" he asked Pickett, when they had both vanished. "I am as certain as that you are standing there that a man came to my bedside and had me tied down to my bed, while he threatened me. But now it seems—"

Pickett coughed.

"I don't want to be critical, colonel," he said, "but I have known a case of nightmare worse than yours, in which it was impossible to distinguish between reality and vision. If I were

you I would say no more about it. If the man is real, he will come again, and we will watch for him. We'll catch him at last, depend upon it."

CHAPTER XVIII.

QUERETARO.

THE town of Queretaro, one of the most beautiful in Mexico, lies at the foot of mountains, which are at such a distance therefrom that they offer no command for artillery, while the whole place is surrounded by fortifications able to bid defiance to the best guns then to be found in Mexico.

In the center of the town rose the imposing pile of the royal palace, with its flat roof and battlements, that commanded a view of the country for many miles round.

The great aqueduct, one of the wonders of Mexico, wound its way across the valley on its lofty arches, and the gardens in which the city was embowered gave it an appearance second to none other in the beautiful land of Mexico.

Near the town rises a little hill crowned with a mass of buildings, of which a church spire is the most prominent. It is surrounded by other buildings. A massive wall of unburned brick, thick enough to resist all but the heaviest artillery, makes the Church of the Holy Cross a veritable fortification, better than could have been found anywhere else in Mexico.

This encircling wall was at least twenty feet thick, being banked up with earth inside, so as to make a broad and commodious rampart on which one might walk at ease, the rampart itself being planted with trees which made a grateful shade in the sultry climate of Mexico and one which was chiefly enjoyed, at ordinary times, by the crowd of monks and priests that made their home in Queretaro.

For Queretaro was, above all things, a stronghold of the church party in Mexico, where the sound of the church bell was never out of one's ears and where the processions were forever filing through the streets with crosses and banners at the head, altar-boys and priests in gorgeous robes following.

But, at the time when Queretaro became the refuge of the emperor of Mexico, the aspect of the place had changed greatly.

The priests were as numerous as ever; but many of them had dropped their priestly robes and taken up the arms of the flesh, becoming soldiers, to save from destruction the religion in which they believed, as the only safety of Mexico; and which the emperor had promised to sustain, with his last breath.

The French troops had been withdrawn, but Maximilian stayed, in the hope of being supported by the Church party, which had been all-powerful in Mexico, for so many years, and which he fondly trusted would yet make him triumphant, over all his adversaries.

A few days after the American Regiment entered the town of Chihuahua, a group of officers, in brilliant uniforms was gathered on the ramparts of Queretaro, looking toward the mountains of the north and the "Hill of Bells," which rose between the town and the mountains.

The officers were bare-headed, and grouped around a tall, fair man, with a flowing blonde beard, who alone wore his cocked hat, in a way that showed him to be the chief.

Nearest to the blonde gentleman stood a man with a beard as black as jet, and fierce dark eyes. This man wore a showy uniform of scarlet and yellow, loaded with gold-lace; and his face was haughty and proud, without being by any means ugly or ignoble.

This was General Miramon, of the Imperialist faction, the chosen friend and confidant of the Emperor Maximilian with whom he was now holding a consultation, as to the best measures to adopt, to defend Queretaro from the expected assault of the Republican army.

"Your majesty can depend on one thing," said Miramon, "that these Juarists will not be like the troops you have been accustomed to see, on the other side of the water. They are not like your own men. They have no uniforms, or such strange ones as no one else would call uniforms; and as for artillery and regular horse, the best they can do is a lot of Indians and mestizos, with bare legs and sandals, armed in every sort of fashion. Your majesty need have no fears that all the forces Juarez can bring to bear on Queretaro, can shake our hold on the province."

The emperor looked round on the country thoughtfully. He had heard this sort of boastful talk, ever since he had come to the country; and yet he had never seen the day when his own soldiers, save those who had come from the other side of the water, could be depended on to stand the assaults of the same despised Juarists, who were now so summarily dismissed by Miramon, with a disdainful sentence, that failed to convince.

But, as he looked out over the country, he marked the white tents that showed the existence of a force of men that must have numbered nearly ten thousand. He also beheld the bright brass guns, that stood in well-kept parks, in the garden of the church below the ramparts, and said, with a more hopeful air:

"We shall not want for the material of war, gentlemen; if the men will only stand by me as they stand by Juarez. They have done well for him, after the way we drove him out to the Yankee country."

"Ay, your majesty, and we shall drive them there again," said Miramon boastfully.

The emperor shook his head, with a slight, mournful smile.

"Be not too confident, gentlemen. You know that the American minister has collected sixty thousand men on the frontiers of Texas, and if the Juarists are not enough to conquer, it may well be that these men, veterans of a great war, will come over the border in their turn."

Miramón curled his lip, as he retorted:

"And if so, your majesty will see the whole country rally to your defense. Our army is very different from that which was beaten by its own dissensions, even before General Scott landed his troops at Vera Cruz twenty years ago. There is but one thing to unite all classes in defense of the empire, and that is the threat of a foreign invasion."

Maximilian nodded his head thoughtfully.

"Perhaps that is why they fought so well against me, general. But we will not borrow trouble. How far do your pickets extend to the north, toward the Juarists, and what is your information as to the strength of their forces?"

Miramón hesitated a moment, and then said, confidently:

"Our cavalry scout up to the gates of Chihuahua, and the best information I have, is that the Juarists have but a beggarly ten thousand men or so, who are ill-armed and lack everything that we have."

Even as he spoke the emperor, who was looking over the hills toward the north, seemed to be attracted by something, for he turned his eyes that way, and finally raised his glass to look.

"There is some dust that looks like news coming to us," he said, and the words caused Miramon to look in the direction indicated.

Presently the form of a horseman at full speed was seen coming down the road from Chihuahua, and he was coming straight toward the ramparts of the church buildings. Ten minutes from the time he was first spied he drew up his foaming horse under the walls, and held up a dispatch.

The emperor beckoned him up hastily, and he came; a man tall and slim, wiry in figure, with a long, pointed red beard.

He handed the packet to Maximilian, who opened it and read:

"The enemy in heavy force are within one day's march of Queretaro, with fifty guns and a large train. (Signed) MEJA, GENERAL."

The war had opened in grim earnest at last, and the expression of the emperor's face showed that he realized it.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE MORMON ENVOY.

THE shades of night had fallen over the city of Queretaro, and the stars were twinkling in the heavens, with the peculiar luster that they exhibit in the dry climates of the upper tablelands of Mexico, when the Emperor Maximilian, alone on the same ramparts from which he had been looking when he received the dispatch from General Meja, his trusted subordinate, was pacing to and fro, in close conversation with the tall, red-bearded man, who had brought the missive to him.

There was no one near them, and the emperor appeared to be listening to his companion, who was making some sort of a proposition, from which the Austrian recoiled.

"Tell me positively, sir," said Maximilian at last, "on what you base your hopes of being able to do as you say."

The man with the red beard coughed slightly before he answered.

"It is a pity that your majesty has to be spoken to in a different way from other people," he said in English, in which the emperor had addressed him, for Maximilian was an excellent linguist, like most of the highly-educated princes of Europe to-day.

The emperor made an impatient gesture.

"Let that go. I know what you Yankees are. You hate the forms and ceremonies which custom has dictated in the old countries as the best foundation of a stable society. I can pardon anything to your ignorant bringing-up, save one thing. Tell me the truth and give me your grounds for telling it. I can excuse anything but deceit in you, in your present position."

The red-bearded man turned to him eagerly.

"And you won't take it ill? You won't get mad with me, if I tell ye?"

"Not if you tell me the truth and nothing but the truth," was the cold reply. "But you must lose no more time. I have come here to see what you had to communicate, against the advice of General Miramon, who thinks you are an impostor. Justify my confidence in you by what you tell me, or I shall have to order you into arrest."

The red-bearded man ground his teeth behind his forest of hair, as he heard the name of Miramon, and answered bitterly:

"Ay, ay, I know Miramon don't believe me;

but I tell the truth, and he'll find it out, when it's too late. I tell ye, sir, that there ain't so much as one honest man left, among all the Greasers that's in your army. They're jest waiting a chance to sell ye out to Juarez, and when the enemy git into position hyar, it won't be the batteries outside that ye'll have to fear, but the traitors inside."

"Admit all that," said Maximilian, impatiently, "and what have you to propose? You tell me you are a Mormon. I have heard of those people, and that they live in the United States, a good many hundred miles away from here. What do you bring from them, and what do you wish me to do?"

"That's business," said Gideon—for it was that worthy apostle of the Latter Day Saints who spoke. "I can talk business as well as the next man, sir, and so you'll find out. I come from Brigham Young himself, the head of all the Mormons. We have an army of fifty thousand men, well armed, when we get all our men together, with a population of nigh a million souls all told."

"And what of that?" asked the emperor, coldly. "I have heard of your men and their horrible customs. But what do you wish of me?"

Gideon shrugged his shoulders.

"We want of you what all the world wants of everybody else: just to be let alone and have friends, instead of enemies. You know, sir, that before that war, which they just finished, our people had a fight with the United States, in which we could have done what we wanted with all the army the States could send against us, but didn't want to get the country down on us for good. All through the entire war, we had things altogether our own way and none to interfere with us. The Government had enough to do, attending to the rebels, to have any care for us, and we had all the emigrants coming in to us, so we have nearly doubled our numbers during the four years they were fighting. Now comes the peace, and they are talking of getting up a railroad through the plains, that will make the time from New York to the Pacific coast only seven days, and bring our people right into the midst of all the Gentiles. Then a fight is bound to come, in the course of time; and Governor Young knows well enough that we can't fight the whole United States, if the cotton States could not do it. He says it is time we began to think of moving out of our place, and finding one where no one will harm us; and he knows of no place so good as this country of Mexico."

The emperor interrupted him harshly.

"To what does all this tend? I am a prince without a kingdom; an emperor who will soon be a prisoner. I have no power to do anything beyond the four walls of this building. Why do you come to me? Why do you not go to Juarez? He has the power now."

"We have been to him," said Gideon coolly, "and he has given us good terms, but not what we want. If you will give us what we ask, we will give you our support, and that of the American Regiment, which has been raised and is now in the Juarist army. We will agree to rouse all the Indians in the mountains for you, and to put you on your throne so that the States themselves cannot hurt you. For all this we only ask your protection for our people, and the giving us a nook in your empire, where we can practice our religion in peace, with none to make us afraid."

Maximilian listened coldly, and when the apostle had ceased, asked:

"Is that all you have to say? Put your plan into plain words."

"I'll make it as plain as daylight," said Gideon eagerly. "I come from Brigham Young himself, and he is the supreme authority in the Church of the Latter Day Saints. He has authorized me to come to Mexico, and make the best terms I can, with either side in the fight. If you will promise that we have the province of Sonora for our own, to rule as we please, without molestation in our religion, we will help you at once, in the siege that is about to open. I have been in the American Regiment, which is in the Juarist army, and will be here to-morrow or next day at furthest. I have, in that regiment, as a flank company, a hundred men, armed in the best manner and ready to do anything and go anywhere. I can vouch that the whole regiment will follow us, and turn over to your service, if we give the word. We propose to let the siege be laid to you, and then to make a sudden change of sides, in the midst of the fighting; to take President Juarez prisoner, and turn him over to you, to be executed as a traitor to you and the Church. All we want is the promise, from you, as emperor, that the Mormons shall be respected in all parts of your dominions; that the colonel of the American Regiment shall be made a duke, and his officers be made nobles as we shall agree afterward. On that condition we will come over to you; and you know that one Yankee, or man from the other side of the sea, is worth a dozen Mexicans to fight."

The emperor sighed slightly.

"I know that. It is the most hopeless feature of all this unhappy nation, that its men

seem to have no patriotism or courage, save in defense of their right to revolt from all sorts of authority. Well, sir, I will think over what you have said, and let you know in time. But this religion of yours; I am not so well informed as to its tenets as I might be. You are, of course, believers in the Scriptures?"

Gideon spread out his hands deprecatingly, as he said:

"We are the most devout people in the world, your majesty, and the only ones left, perhaps, who really and truly believe in the Scriptures and their truth. We have a revelation from Heaven, and it is proven by miracles, that cannot be gainsayed."

"I have heard," continued the emperor, "that you have some peculiar tenets in your faith. Is that so? You are practitioners of polygamy, I am told. If that is the fact it will make a difference, for the holy church has declared, again and again, through its head, that we can only tolerate the existence of one wife. A man shall leave father and mother and cleave to his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. Polygamy is a damnable heresy, that only exists in the countries where Mohammedans and such like wicked heretics and infidels have power. Whatever else I might do, it would not be possible for me to permit the practice of such a tenet in my dominions. That must be clearly understood."

The Mormon apostle looked at the emperor as he spoke, and ground his teeth. The mild and handsome face of the unfortunate Austrian prince did not conceal the expression of indomitable resolution which he wore when he said this.

Gideon frowned as he retorted:

"Your majesty can choose, then, between the loss of your crown and life and the toleration of the practices which were followed by Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; by King David, and every king of Israel; by all the prophets that ever lived, and which is nowhere declared to be a sin. We Mormons do as David did, and if we cannot find peace in one country we will seek till we find another where we can have as many wives as we please."

CHAPTER XX.

THE ENEMY AT LAST.

THE manner of the Mormon, as he spoke the last words, was that of extreme anger, and the way in which he brought out his Scriptural illustrations showed that he was honestly indignant at the way in which the pious emperor had characterized the popular institution of Mormonism. The names had their effect on Maximilian, who had never heard the institution of polygamy justified openly, and had had no idea of the strong defense that could be made for it.

A little startled at the way Gideon spoke, the emperor said:

"But, my dear sir, the names you give are all in the Old Testament; and that dispensation has been superseded by that of the holy church, throughout the world."

Gideon's eye flashed as he answered:

"Ay, and truly, and that church, in its turn, has been superseded by the new church of the Latter Day Saints, and the word of the Lord, sent by the mouth of Joseph Smith, his prophet. I come from the only man in our times who can claim prophetic authority, and, for the last time, I offer you the help of the church, if you, in your turn, will help us."

The Austrian prince shook his head sadly as he said:

"On such terms my alliance is impossible. I judge no man, but I know that I cannot forsake my own church. Our interview is ended, sir, and you are at liberty to depart."

As he spoke, he raised his hand and waved it, as he stood out in the starlight, as a signal to some soldiers, who had been watching the interview out of earshot but in plain sight. Gideon sullenly saluted and turned on his heel to go when the emperor asked him:

"Where do you go now, sir?"

"To the camp of Juarez," was the short reply. "I have done here."

The emperor waved his hand in salute, and the Mormon emissary took his departure, while Maximilian rejoined his guards.

As he did so the leader of the guard, a young officer who was a devoted admirer of the emperor, said excitedly:

"Shall we not stop that man, your majesty?"

"And wherefore?" asked Maximilian, mildly.

"For fear he may go over to the enemy," said the officer.

The emperor shook his head.

"He came from them, and he will go back to them. Let him go, sir. I came to Mexico, not to destroy, but to build up. If a sacrifice is demanded I am the one who will suffer, and not my people. Let the man go, and let fate do her worst."

Then, with a slow step and a mournful air, he wended his way to his quarters, the last he was ever to occupy in this world.

He reached his apartments, which were splendidly furnished, and found there a dark-faced officer in a colonel's uniform, to whom he said cheerfully:

"Well, Lopez, and what say the scouts now?"

Colonel Lopez was the chief of scouts, and he returned, in the same boastful way Miramon had used:

"The scouts report that the enemy are demoralized and ready to come over to your majesty on a promise of forgiveness for the past. We have excellent news from the capital, and even if this fellow Escobedo, who commands the Juarist forces, dares to lay siege to the town of Queretaro—"

"And he will do it, to-morrow night, at latest," interrupted Maximilian, coldly. "Remember that, Lopez."

Lopez laughed as he answered:

"Then he will find himself between two fires, for we are assured of an army, raised by the church party in Mexico itself, which will be on the march hither as soon as it is known that the rebels are in arms against your majesty."

Maximilian shook his head doubtfully, saying:

"I should like better to see them here before they are needed to repel an actual siege. But are you sure that you can depend on the men now in the town to fight to the last?"

Lopez answered at once, with much confidence:

"As sure as I am of my own fidelity, your majesty; and you can be sure that will last to the end of my life."

Maximilian looked at his subordinate penetratingly.

"I hope so, Lopez; but there will be great temptations thrown in your way when the Liberals besiege us actually."

Lopez colored deeply as he said:

"I hope your majesty does not think that I could under any circumstances—"

The emperor waved his hand wearily.

"I accuse no one till the time comes. But we shall see what is to happen in due time. Now let us snatch what rest we can before the guns rouse us from our slumbers."

He signified by his manner that he wished to be left alone, and Lopez left the room bowing low.

When he was in the passage the Mexican colonel muttered to himself in a dissatisfied manner:

"I wonder what he meant? Can he suspect anything? But no. These fair-haired Germans are fools. They cannot keep their faces like a mask, as we can. As for the price, we will settle that after awhile."

And he went to his quarters where he took out a letter which he read all alone by himself, as if to familiarize himself with its contents before he concealed it between the lining of his boot and the outer sole.

The letter was written in Spanish and bore the signature in a fine, running hand:

"ESCOBEDO."

What the contents were will be disclosed in the course of time and this story.

Then quiet settled over the town of Queretaro, till the bugles of the garrison sounded reveillé and the sun rose showing the whole country round them as yet innocent of foes.

The morning passed away and General Miramon, who had passed the time on the ramparts, was beginning to jest with the emperor on the news that Meja had sent them, discrediting it entirely, when the lookout man at the top of the steeple of the Church of the Holy Cross fired a pistol to attract attention and began to wave a white and red flag to and fro in a peculiar manner, signaling to the general and signal officer on the ramparts.

Maximilian saw the flag wave, and said to Miramon, with a smile of sad meaning:

"You see, my dear general, that Meja has told us the truth. The enemy are coming now, or I am much mistaken."

Miramon was watching his signal-officer, who was conning his books in great haste, to interpret the waves of the flag.

Presently the young officer looked up, and said, in a low tone, audible only to the emperor and Miramon:

"The lookout signals a fight going on, at the top of the pass from Chihuahua. He thinks it is our own scouts, and an enemy."

"Tell him to watch and keep on reporting," said Miramon, hastily.

Then, for some little time, the eyes of the gazers on the ramparts were riveted on the top of the church-spire, more lofty than even their own position, and at last came the message again:

"He says that it is General Meja, with all his cavalry, and that a regiment of infantry is fighting him, and driving him back. He can see no guns yet."

Here the emperor jumped up, his usually mild and phlegmatic face showing symptoms of unusual alacrity, as he said:

"Order the horses, gentlemen, and we will go and give Meja a hand. It is not well to wait here, till they have shut us in, without so much as a blow in our own defense."

Miramon brightened up and made no objection, for he loved an open fight in the field, as well as any man.

A few minutes later, the emperor, magnificently mounted and followed by a strong body

of cavalry, was riding toward the point where the fight was signaled.

His men were full of fire and enthusiasm; for it was their first fight under the eye of the emperor, and up to the time the French troops had left Mexico, the Imperialists had not suffered a reverse, while they had driven the president-elect, Juarez, to the shelter of the United States, from which he had but just returned.

Splendidly equipped and well mounted were all these young cavaliers, who rejoiced in the title of the "Emperor's Body-guard."

They were all young hidalgos, sons of rich men or rich themselves, and were tricked out in the bravery of costume, that obtains in no country like Mexico. They were well armed and full of confidence, so that their progress was rapid, till they had passed the aqueduct, and galloped up the slope of the Chihuahua high-road, in time to see a cloud of dust coming down from the pass in the mountains, where the lookout had signaled the fight.

It was less than ten miles from the city, when he had first descried it, and by the time the body-guard had got out, the dust had come close to the "Monte de las Campanas," or "Hill of Bells," which overlooks the city.

There the body-guard paused a few minutes, to breathe their horses, and get in good order, when the rapid approach of the dust showed that their own men must be retreating in haste.

The emperor cast a rapid glance over the field, and ordered a cautious advance, which brought them in contact with the dust in another mile or two. As he had anticipated, it proved to come from the cavalry of General Meja, who had been skirmishing, vainly trying to stop the advance of an army, approaching from Chihuahua. Meja himself was excited and angry with his men for running, and the emperor ordered a charge of the body-guard to cover the retreat of the cavalry. The charge was just ready to start, when a broad flash came from a hill near by, followed by the hum of a round shot. The enemy had artillery after all.

CHAPTER XXI.

INVESTED AT LAST.

MEANTIME, up on the hill where the enemy had taken his stand, Gideon the Apostle, at the head of a troop of more than a hundred well armed and mounted men, was advancing before the skirmish line, thrown out by the American Regiment itself, which had been given the honor of the advance.

The Mormon apostle looked excited and elated at the ease with which he had been driving the spiritless horsemen of Meja, who had behaved so badly that their general was frantic with rage.

Gideon had met them, some miles from the pass, when he had rejoined his own men, from the secret expedition in which he had taken Meja's letter to the emperor, with the cynical indifference to treason to either side, that had characterized his whole conduct in the affair. He had made his treaty with Meja and the emperor, on an understanding, with Brooke, that if Maximilian came to the terms he demanded, the American Regiment was to change sides, during the siege, Brooke depending on his own eloquence and the brilliant rewards he could offer, to shake the fidelity of the men to Juarez, and turn them to Maximilian.

Whether he could have done so or not, is uncertain; but the unexpected firmness of Maximilian on the subject of a foreign religion had upset all the fine plans, and Gideon had resumed the advance, the moment he had reported to Meja the failure of the negotiations.

Now he was fighting the man he had been hobnobbing with, only a night or two before, and watching the operations of Captain Milleno, an Irish officer, who commanded the light battery which had accompanied the American Regiment and the Mormon cavalry.

As the first shot went humming on its way toward the brilliant body-guard of the emperor, Gideon exclaimed:

"That will show the proud Austrian if he was wise to reject the alliance of the Saints. The sword of the Lord and Gideon!"

He spoke to himself, with a wild luster in his eye that showed the man to be something of a fanatic, and sincere so far; though, in his conversation with Brooke, he had more than hinted that his grip on the doctrines of the Latter Day Saints was merely that of convenience. The fire of battle had roused all the enthusiasm he had in his nature, and, for the moment at least, he was a sincere believer in the tenets of Mormonism.

The battery was one of four guns, and opened fire as the horses galloped up into position, with a precision that was the pride of the Irish captain who commanded them. He was one of the foreign officers in the Liberal army, who was a sincere Juarist; and who, had he known the way in which Gideon and Brooke had been trading with the Austrian prince, would have been the first to reject with scorn any idea of changing his allegiance.

The fire of his battery threw the brilliant es-

cort of the emperor into dire confusion, almost instantly, and the whole body set off at full speed toward Queretaro, followed by the Mormons, firing their repeating-rifles as they went, while the American Regiment came up at double-quick time, and passed the battery, despite the shouts of Milleno, who did not wish his fire to be masked by other troops, but who was compelled to limber up and gallop off, to find a better position.

This he speedily found on the Hill of Bells, from whence he could send his shot into the city itself, while the poorly disciplined forces of the emperor, at the first blast of serious war, retreated within the walls that encircled the city and returned the fire of Milleno's battery from all the ordnance they had: twenty pieces, all told.

Their aim was not as good as that of the trained artillerymen who fought under the Irish officer, but their numbers were great enough to drive off the battery and compel it to take refuge under the shelter of the hill.

This slight success elated them so greatly that an advance was made by five batteries, together, followed by a force of infantry and the emperor's body-guard, under the personal command of Miramon, Meja and Maximilian himself, which drove the Mormons and the American Regiment back for nearly a mile and left the Imperialists in possession of the Hill of Bells.

But as they stood there the gleam of bayonets came over the ridge from which Gideon had descended, and before the afternoon had come to an end twenty thousand troops had been brought into action, with batteries of artillery, which drove the Imperialists back, notwithstanding a sharp resistance, till, at sunset, the city of Queretaro was invested on all sides, and the Hill of Bells finally occupied by a strong force of infantry, the American Regiment at the head, while three batteries were playing on the city from various points. The emperor himself, seeing the hopelessness of resisting the attack and defending the whole city, retired into the strong inclosure of the Church of the Holy Cross, where he prepared for a desperate resistance, his enemies increasing every moment.

Brooke had been placed in command of the force on the Hill of Bells, with Milleno in command of the artillery at that point, and as night closed in the colonel said to the battery leader:

"I think we have him pretty safe now, Millen."

The Irish officer shrugged his shoulders as he replied:

"A fox is never called dead, colonel, till his brush is nailed up on the barn-door. That Austrian fellow fights well, and, if he only had some decent soldiers, he might give us a good deal of trouble yet. For my own part, I wish I could see him safely out of this country."

"He will never get out of this country alive," said Brooke, with a scowl. "He has made his bed and he must lie on it. If we take him, we shall have to shoot him."

Millen started. He had been brought up in the English army, in his youth, and in becoming a soldier of fortune he had not lost his finer feelings.

"Indeed, and we ought to do no such thing, colonel," he said. "He will be a prisoner of war, and the most we can do with him is to send him home to his people, on the other side of the sea. Why, man, don't you know that he is the brother of the Emperor of Austria? To kill him would bring down the contempt of the civilized world on us and turn this war into a butchery."

Brooke sneered openly, as he retorted:

"One can't make war with kid gloves on, Millen. If he is taken he will have to be shot, for an example. You foreigners don't know what the Monroe doctrine is to us. Foreign princes must keep out of this continent or take the consequences. He has killed enough of our men under his order of execution."

Millen colored deeply, as he replied:

"Colonel Brooke, ye may be a good soldier, in your way, I'm not denying it; but ye have a queer idea of the customs of civilized warfare. I'll lend no hand to any such atrocity, ye may be sure."

And the accent, which showed his irritation, showed also that he meant what he said, and would stand by it.

Brooke made no reply, but set the guards for the night, and the camp of the Juarist besiegers was soon quiet, as the men made themselves comfortable after their long march to Queretaro.

Soon after tattoo the principal officers of the army were called to the tent of General Escobedo, who was in chief command, and a plan of siege was given to them. The bombardment was to begin at sunrise and continue till the town was laid in ashes, while the troops were to occupy every avenue they could get hold of and invest the Church of the Holy Cross closely.

The council of war over, Brooke walked back to his camp with the Mormon chief, from whom he learned the particulars of his fruitless interview with the emperor the night before. Both agreed that, under the circumstances, if Maximilian should be taken, he would have to be executed, to prevent him giving any information of the offers he had received from the camp of

Escobedo. That point settled, the colonel retired to his tent, remarking to Gideon:

"If Horace Arnold gets into this camp, he will be a smarter man than any one I ever saw."

Gideon replied with a grin:

"I hope he will. If he does, let me see him scare me as he has you, and I will own him a better man than I thought him."

Then they parted, Brooke going to his own tent, while the Mormon chief occupied one close by him. Brooke had no fears that night, for he had taken every precaution against surprise and had a sentry walking his beat in full view from his couch.

Nevertheless, when he woke, which was in the dark, he found himself bound down to his bed, as he had been before, while a shadowy figure stood over him in the darkened tent, and the voice of Doctor Satan said close to his ear:

"George Brooke, I have come for the last time. Confess thy sins or take the reward of treason!"

CHAPTER XXII.

THE SECOND VISIT.

To say that George Brooke was surprised at the sudden coming of the magician (as predicted) in the very moment when the colonel thought himself safest, is too little.

He was completely frightened, and the sweat ran down his face and bathed every fiber of his body, as he lay in the bed in which he had been bound, and stared up at his merciless interrogator.

"Confess thy sins and make restitution," repeated Doctor Satan, in the same grim way; and as he spoke, Brooke heard the step of the sentry outside the tent, with a distinctness that surprised himself and made him think it still more of a dream.

For, this time, he did not dare to cry out. He felt as if a heavy weight had been laid on his chest, which prevented him from uttering a syllable, if his life had depended on it.

"A third time I ask; and then thy sins be upon thee," repeated the magician sternly. "Wilt thou confess, or not?"

In a husky whisper, Brooke replied:

"You know, as well as I do. What am I to confess?"

The magician looked down at him in the same stern, pitiless way.

"Confess the crime that tore two lovers from each other; that gave thee wealth, and me a prison. Confess it all, and make restitution, now, before it be too late."

Brooke, in the same panic terror, which had already seized him at this third attempt to frighten him, answered:

"I will confess everything you wish. I will make what restitution I can; but what can I do? The money is all gone, long ago; and for the rest, what do you wish? Horace Arnold, why have you followed me hither, to torment me? I cannot undo the past, any more than you can."

The magician nodded his head gravely, as he said:

"So much is true. There are things that none can undo; but there are others that can be atoned for."

"Tell me what to do, and I will do it," said the trembling man, in a tone that could hardly have been recognized as his own, so weak and husky was it.

Doctor Satan replied:

"Write out a full confession of all your wickedness in the matter of Clara Walden and myself, and take it to the general of your army. Leave it with him, for me, and it will be sufficient."

Brooke looked surprised as he asked:

"General Escobedo? Do you know him?"

"I know every one in the army; or how should I be here?" replied the magician in the same way. "Write the confession, this coming day, and give it to him. Promise this, and I leave you now. Refuse, or break the promise, and your doom is sealed."

"I promise," gasped the man, in the bed, in the same husky whisper as before; and the magician immediately pressed his hand with a handkerchief, on the face of the colonel, who felt the same strangling sensation, and faded away into insensibility once more, to wake with a splitting headache, and the morning light shining in at the side of the tent, while Crocker's voice was saying:

"Roll-call all through, colonel. Orders from General Escobedo, sir."

Brooke rubbed his eyes with a sense that all was not right, but his remembrance of the previous night was vague and dream-like, while the unbelief with which he had been met, when he related his previous mysterious experiences, kept him from saying anything to Crocker about this second visit. In fact, he was not quite certain, at the moment, whether he had not dreamed the whole affair, so little trace had been left of his adventure.

He mechanically took the envelope held out by the adjutant, and found it an order from the commander of the army to report at the headquarters tent, at ten o'clock, for a council of war.

"Council of war," muttered the colonel. "That means no fight."

He remembered the old adage about councils of war.

"All right, Mr. Crocker," he said to the adjutant, as the latter waited for an answer. "I'll be there on time. Send my man to me, and we'll have breakfast, sir. The roll-call is all right, I suppose, or you would have said something about it. Any signs of the enemy making a sally, sir?"

The adjutant laughed as he replied:

"Not a whit, sir. All quiet as the grave, inside and out. I say, colonel, these Mexicans are regular frauds, after all; are they not? I began to think that there might be exceptions among them, owing to the way those Toltecas came down on us; but the Imperialists are not worth the powder it will take to blow them out of their places."

Thus he rattled on for awhile, and then left Brooke to dress and have his breakfast, after which the colonel strolled out to see what was being done toward the prosecution of the siege.

It had struck him as rather singular that the bombardment, which had begun so smartly the night before, should not have been resumed in the morning, and he looked to see the cause thereof.

Millen's batteries were parked at the top of the Hill of Bells; the white cloths over the guns and carriages, as if the captain had made up his mind that there would be no firing that day.

Millen himself was seated on a camp-stool in front of the guns smoking a pipe and looking at the distant city of Queretaro, in a meditative manner.

"What's the matter, Millen?" asked the colonel, greeting him.

The Irish officer looked up quietly.

"The matter? What should be the matter, colonel? There's nothing the matter, and that's the pity of it, ye know."

"What do you mean?" asked Brooke.

The artilleryman smiled dryly as he answered:

"Haven't ye heard the orders?"

"Nothing but a council of war at ten."

"And isn't that enough, man? When ye've been as long in this sairvice as I have ye'll know that councils of war *always* mean bargain and sale. We aren't to fight for Queretaro at all, but some blackguard inside is goin' to sell the place to us."

And the Irish artilleryman spat on the ground in great disgust at the idea of such a thing; for he was an enthusiast in the military art, and loved a good battle.

"We'll have no fight this day, colonel," he added, "so the sooner ye make up your mind to put on your best uniform and make a speech in yer best Spanish, the better ye'll do this day."

Brooke scowled at the city as he said:

"It doesn't look much of a place to take, and if they don't fight any better than they did yesterday I'd undertake to go in there with my own regiment."

"Ay, ay," replied Millen, dryly, "but that's not the general's little game. This war wasn't got up for the express purpose of giving the best chances to the Americans to distinguish themselves and let the Greasers see how well they can fight. There goes the bugle for the council now. Will we go together, or are ye too proud to walk with a captain, now ye've got the colonel's epaulette on your shoulder?"

Brooke laughed and took the arm the other proffered, for he had always liked Millen, who was said to be the best officer the Mexicans had in their service. The two friends took their way to the great white marquee in which the council was to be held, the tent being distinguished from the rest by a flag with the eagle of Mexico displayed on its folds.

They found the officers assembling here, and Brooke had taken his place to wait for the opening of the council, when he gave a sudden start and asked Millen in an agitated tone:

"Who in heaven's name is that man yonder?"

The Irishman was surprised at the tone in which he spoke, and at the violent agitation of the speaker, for Brooke was usually pale and staid, and the man he had indicated, as if it had been a ghost.

The captain looked over in the direction indicated, and saw a tall, handsome officer in a uniform that he recognized.

"Why, that's one of Escobedo's staff," he said, quietly. "What's the matter with ye, man? He won't bite ye, will he? But I don't know him. He's a new man—and, bedad, a devilish handsome one, too."

And the Irish captain smiled with honest pleasure at the sight of the man he had eulogized.

Brooke made no answer, but sat a moment staring at the other. Then his gaze went roving round the tent, and lighted on the Mormon apostle, Gideon Scott, who sat near the general.

Brooke caught his eye at last, and indicated that he wished to speak to Gideon. The Mormon understood the gesture, and came over beside his chief, who said in a whisper:

"Don't you see him? Haven't you recognized him yet?"

Gideon looked round him with such unfeigned amazement that the colonel hastily and furtively pointed over to the brilliantly-clad staff officer who had excited his suspicion, whispering:

"The man in the yellow uniform, with the crimson sash. Don't you know him, Gideon? That is the man I mean—Horace Arnold."

The Mormon chief turned on his camp-chair, and stared deliberately at the officer spoken of, whose side was turned to him. When he had finished his inspection, he said, quietly:

"Then he has changed more than you have, Brooke, for I swear I should never have known him. Is that Horace Arnold? Are you sure?"

"Sure! Of course I am, man," returned the colonel, irritably. "Didn't he come to my tent again last night?"

The Mormon started at the news.

"If that's so it's time he was stopped," he said.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE COUNCIL OF WAR.

BEFORE they could say more the general rapped on the table, and opened the council, by saying:

"Gentlemen, I have called you together to ask your advice, and to acquaint you with certain facts. We are here, in the presence of the usurper who has so long enjoyed our fair country, and we have him in a trap from which he cannot escape. The only question is, whether we shall storm the place and sacrifice the lives of brave Mexicans in crushing out this nest of traitors, or shall we wait a day or two, till the men in the employ of the usurper give him up to us."

Then he looked round the tent at the others, as who should say that he knew what would be their decision.

For a little while there was no answer, and then Millen, though the lowest in rank there, said quietly:

"Is there any certainty that, if we wait, the town will be given up to us, general?"

Escobedo looked at him as if surprised at the question. He was a sly-looking Mexican, swarthy and polite, with a furtive glance and a reputation for intrigue.

"It is incompatible with the public interest to answer such a question categorically, Señor Millen," he said at last; "but you may rest assured that I should not have brought the matter before the council, if I had not some reason for so doing."

Millen rose and saluted the general punctiliously, as he said:

"The information is all that is necessary, general. I only asked because I want a chance to practice my guns at the church of the Holy Cross. I think I could take down the steeple before I finished."

The little joke produced a laugh, and the general continued:

"That is the natural impatience of our brave soldiers for a battle, in which the victory is gained by hard blows; but a victory gained without the effusion of a drop of blood is better still. Let Colonel Don Diablo Satani tell what he knows."

All eyes were turned curiously on the general; for the name was so singular that it startled the boldest there.

As the general spoke, he indicated, with a wave of his hand, the handsome officer who had been sitting by him, and who had caused Brooke so much uneasiness.

The face of this officer was the same which had been seen by the men of the American Regiment at El Paso, as "Doctor Satan," and the name showed that it was the same man.

He was attired in a picturesque uniform of yellow buckskin, with a scarlet sash round the waist, and wore quite a heavy armament. As the general spoke, this officer rose and bowed low, while he said in excellent Spanish:

"The general commands that I tell what I know of the fate of Queretaro; and I am ready. Within twenty-four hours, I have received an offer from one of the officers, high in the confidence of the usurper, to open the gates at midnight, when a certain signal is given; and to admit all the troops we wish within the defenses of the place, so that we may take Maximilian prisoner, or kill him, as may be judged best for the interests of Mexico."

Millen, who seemed to be the least bashful person in the tent, here interposed:

"And where was the agreement made, sir? In the town, or out of it? That makes a difference, ye know."

Don Diablo smiled.

"The agreement was made before the high altar of the church, at midnight, when all the suite of the emperor was sleeping; and no one was thought to be near. Is the answer sufficient?"

Millen sunk back in his seat, with a sort of sigh.

"It is sufficient, señor. Never was found a

garrison that didn't have a traitor somewhere in it. I'd rather take the place by storm, ten times over, than have it sold to us."

The Mexicans present smiled, as if they were prepared to make allowances for Millen, who was looked on as an impracticable man in certain particulars; but the general said, kindly:

"The sentiment is a just one, and deserves to be commended; but a general must be sparing of the lives of his men. The price demanded is a heavy one; but I shall take the responsibility of paying it, for the sake of taking this usurper prisoner."

Here Don Diablo, who had been listening to him, observed in the quietest of tones:

"It may be better for us all, general, if he be not taken prisoner, but allowed to escape. The consequences of taking him prisoner might turn out serious, if not fatal."

"Why so?" asked the general, in a tone as if he wished the answer to be given to the council.

Don Diablo understood him, and said distinctly:

"Maximilian, a prisoner, must be tried; and either punished or sent from the country. Allowed to escape, he will become an object of contempt to the world. If he be shot, he will be a martyr, and the republic exposed to the reproach of breaking the laws of civilized warfare. That is why I say he should be allowed to escape, if it be a possibility."

As he finished, there was a murmur of assent round the council, which was composed of old and experienced officers; and Millen said:

"That is good logic, Señor Satani, if that's your name. Maximilian is an elephant on our hands, if we get him; and the best thing we can do is to send him off quietly."

Here Brooke, who had not said a word all the time, but had been staring at Satani, as if trying to accustom himself to the sight of the man he feared so much, broke in:

"I don't agree with the gentleman, general. If you take this pretended emperor, and do not punish him for the murders he has committed, against the Liberals, people will say you are afraid of him, and even the Americans, who are your friends, will despise you, and perhaps come and take your country from you, satisfied that you dare not defend your rights, as they have been bequeathed to you."

The sentiment produced another low murmur of assent, which proceeded from the younger soldiers present; and a cavalry officer jumped up, and cried out:

"Ay, ay. Did not the usurper issue an order two years ago, by which my brother was shot to death, for no other crime but defending his country? And for that, they stigmatized him as a brigand, and he was murdered by these Imperialists, with the man Miramon to give the order for his execution. I say that, if we take this Austrian prisoner, we should make him drink of the cup he has given to others, and shoot him as an enemy to society."

This time there was a decided round of applause and jingle of scabbards; and Escobedo, seeing that the sentiment of the assembly was changing, in a manner that suited his real designs, said, in his most insinuating way:

"That is well; but we have not taken the city yet. Don Diablo will be empowered to continue his negotiations with the officer in the service of the usurper, and we will hope for a fortunate issue to the adventure. In the mean time, the bombardment will be resumed, and we will endeavor to make lodgments as high to the walls of the church inclosure, as possible. Gentlemen, the council is dismissed."

The assembly broke up, and the officers strolled away, while the orders necessary for the closer investment of the city of Queretaro were issued.

Brooke found himself, as the council broke up, near Gideon; and both were not far from the mysterious Don Diablo, in the character of aide-de-camp to Escobedo.

The Mormon chief looked puzzled as he noticed that the staff officer did not look toward them, or evince any consciousness of their presence, any more than of others, though he was less than ten feet from them, as they stood by the door of the council-tent.

"Are you sure that it is the same man?" whispered Gideon to the colonel, as he watched the stranger.

Brooke nodded.

"If it be not, it is the most wonderful likeness in the world; and besides that, the name is the same as that he assumed in the character of a magician at El Paso. It must be the same."

Gideon hesitated a moment, and then, with a shrug of the shoulders as if trying to throw off a weight, said curtly:

"I'll settle it, if it is."

And he stalked up to the strange officer and placed himself right in front of him, saluting him familiarly, and saying:

"Mr. Arnold, it is a long time since I've seen you."

The Mexican officer turned his head slowly and eyed the Mormon from head to foot, without moving a muscle of his dark face, as he said in Spanish:

"What is the matter, sir?"

Gideon squared his big frame opposite the

other, and retorted, in English, with an insolent smile:

"That won't do, Arnold. You know me, and I know you. You're Horace Arnold, and the sooner you get put where you belong, the better it will be for the general."

The Mexican officer stared at him in the same puzzled way, as he said in Spanish:

"I don't talk English, señor. What do you want with me?"

Gideon hesitated a moment, and then, as he gazed closer at the other, he broke out angrily in English:

"I tell you it won't do. You're Horace Arnold; and if you're out of the lunatic asylum, it is because you have made your escape. I'll have you put back there, as soon as I can tell the general who you are."

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE FIRST VICTIM.

GIDEON had spoken in a loud voice, and his manner called the attention of several officers toward him.

Don Diablo, on the other hand, spoke low and politely, and his manner was that of perfect calmness as he answered the other.

Millen who was near by heard the disturbance, and came up to ask:

"What is the matter, señores?"

He spoke in Spanish, and Don Diablo eagerly turned to him, saying in the same tongue:

"This gentleman persists in talking English to me, señor, when I have told him I do not understand him. Will you be good enough to translate for me, for you, I believe, talk the American tongue."

Millen translated what he had said to Gideon, who retorted in English as before:

"He talks as good English as either of us, captain, but he is trying to play roots on me. His name isn't Don Diablo, but Horace Arnold, and he's an escaped lunatic, who has got down here on some wild-goose chase or other. I know him well, for I took him to the asylum when he was ordered there."

Millen stared at him doubtfully, and the Mexican officers, who saw that some trouble was brewing between the two, crowded round as the Mormon made his accusation.

Don Diablo showed no sign of understanding what was said till the Irish captain translated, when he answered at once:

"The gentleman is mistaken, at the least. How can I be what the gentleman says when I am in Mexico, and have lived there for many years?"

Millen translated, but Gideon broke in on him before he was through.

"Ay, ay; I understand what you mean, well enough. But these lunatics are as artful as the devil himself, and I know him well."

How do you know me?" asked Don Diablo, when the reply had been translated to him.

As he spoke, he drew up his tall form to its full height and stood up before the Mormon.

Gideon was staggered for a moment, and then said:

"If it is the same man, he has a scar on the back of his head under the hair, made by the end of a club. It is a three-cornered mark, for the stick was a square one, and he got it with the corner."

Millen again translated, and Don Diablo smiled as he said:

"Such marks are common enough, but no sure signs. If the gentleman has nothing better than that, he is a fool, as well as a knave, and there is only one way to check his impertinence."

So saying, he stalked up to the other before Gideon was aware of what he meant, and drawing off his long gauntlet-glove, struck the Mormon across the face with a loud smack.

He had hardly done so, when Gideon started back and whipped out a pistol, intent to shoot him down at once.

But before he could fire Millen and several other officers had seized his arm, crying in horror-stricken tones, that "he must be careful; the general was near by, and they would all be broken for such a fight."

Gideon was sufficiently cool to see that they were right, but as he was still foaming at the mouth with rage at the public insult he had received, he was pacified by Don Diablo, who said sweetly:

"Let the gentleman possess his soul in peace. I will give him all the satisfaction he can desire."

"The sooner the better," said Millen, quickly. "This is a serious matter, señor, for you have struck an officer before us all, and you are bound to fight him at once."

"Who will stand my friend, then?" asked the staff officer, in the same tranquil way, at which there was an instant proof of service from near a dozen officers, while Brooke came close to Gideon and whispered to him:

"You must kill him, or we are not safe."

Gideon favored him with a ghastly smile as he said:

"I'll make him repent the day he crossed me."

Then they all strolled away from the tent in

groups, and to the edge of the camp, where a place fit for the duel was found, with a rapidity and skill that argued long practice and willingness on the part of all present.

The weapons to be used were agreed to at once. The sword was preferred, as making no noise; for shots would have attracted the attention of the provost-guard, and that might have been awkward; as the general might have been forced to take notice of a thing that he generally winked at, and pretended not to see or hear.

Within half an hour from the breaking up of the council, Gideon Scott and Don Diablo, both men stripped to the waist, stood opposite each other, saber in hand.

They were evenly matched in height; but the frame of the Mormon was much the heavier of the two, and his eye had a glare of angry anticipated triumph in it, that showed he expected to be the victor.

The moment the word was given, both men crossed swords with a clash, and then sprung back out of reach, to avoid an unwary blow.

Then the Mormon rushed in with a sweeping cut, trying to beat down the guard of the staff officer, who, on his part, parried the blow with ease, and returned a light slash, which might have disabled the arm of the other, and actually inflicted a scratch thereon.

Scott uttered an angry growl, for he had prided himself on his swordsmanship; but the lesson made him cautious and he played in a more guarded manner.

Don Diablo, on his part, did not offer to attack for several passes, contenting himself with holding his guard well up, and keeping out of measure; playing at the wrist and sword-arm of the Mormon, who seemed to be bothered by the play, to which he was unaccustomed.

At last Don Diablo gave a fine opening at the leg he thrust in advance, hoping to induce Gideon to strike at it.

But the bait did not take as he had intended, for the trick was too old for the other to be cheated by it. Instead of cutting at the leg, he cut at the head, and pressed close on the Mexican, till he had fought his way to a half-arm rally, when he beat up Satani's blade with his own sword, and suddenly swinging forward his left leg and hand, tried to grasp the Mexican's sword-arm, while he stabbed him with his own weapon.

It was a daring and skillful movement of the kind known as "brigand fencing," only tolerated in a duel without rule.

Most men would have been caught by it, but Don Diablo, with a counter movement as swift as the other, retired his sword-arm out of danger, and throwing forward his own left hand, caught the wrist of the Mormon, while he ran his saber through Gideon's body, till the hilt clinked against the other's ribs.

A yell of irrepressible pain, and down fell the Mormon desperado, the blood gushing from his breast, the saber falling from his nerveless hand as he fell.

Brooke uttered a low cry of alarm and rushed to succor his dying principal, when Don Diablo, withdrawing the weapon from the body of the dying Mormon, said, in English, in a low voice, to Brooke, as he knelt by his friend:

"That is the first. Send your confession to Escobedo, or you will be the second."

Then he turned and walked away as if nothing had happened, while the Mexicans, who had come with him, followed him, their faces showing that they were proud of the way in which he had sustained the national honor against one, who, though an ally, was, after all, only one of the "Malditos Yanquis."

As they passed along, Millen, who had come with them, observed to Don Diablo, in Spanish:

"You handle the saber well, sir. Where did you learn, if the question is a fair one?"

Don Diablo smiled, as he replied:

"In several places, though I never took a regular lesson. In the mean time, captain, we shall have a little more fun to-day. The general thinks it may be as well to fire a few rounds, to make the usurper think we are making a regular siege. If we show too quiet a face he may suspect something, and frustrate the treachery of Lopez."

"Lopez!" echoed Millen with a whistle of surprise. "And so that's the man that is to sell his master. Did you know that his head is forfeit, if he is not pardoned?"

The other nodded, and as they reached the vicinity of Millen's battery, the captain observed in English:

"By the by, Señor Satani, I suppose you are aware that I heard what that Mormon said to you?"

He spoke carelessly, but the Mexican was not to be caught. Instead of this, he said in Spanish:

"Do me the favor to talk Spanish. I do not understand the English."

Millen shrugged his shoulders as he replied:

"It was something very like English that you spoke to Brooke. By the by, señor, if ever you were in an American asylum it would not hurt you here."

Don Diablo smiled.

"That may well be, señor. As for what I said to Colonel Brooke, that was a secret be-

tween us, and goes no further. Is that understood?"

The Irish officer bowed.

"It is a matter of honor between us, of course. Where are you going now?"

The Mexican pointed to the city.

"I am going thither with a flag of truce, to demand a surrender, which will be refused. After that we shall see what we shall see."

So saying he went off, and in a few minutes more was seen riding toward Queretaro, with a flag of truce and a trumpeter.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE FLAG OF TRUCE.

On the ramparts of the Church of the Holy Cross, during the council of war in the Liberal army, a like council was going on between the emperor and his staff.

General Miramon, who well knew that, in the event of a capture of the place, his own life was not likely to meet with much respect at the hands of men whom he had fought so relentlessly as he had the Juarists, was gruff and silent, and only gave his opinion when it was asked, while Lopez, whose dark face was strangely pallid, talked a great deal and proffered all sorts of schemes.

The emperor, whose education in Europe had accustomed him to thinking of soldiers as men who would cheerfully obey orders and go to death in pursuance of their leader's plan, was surprised at the quiet which had come over the Liberal forces since dawn. He had fully expected to see a renewal of the bombardment and to find the outposts pushed forward as far as possible, with frequent skirmishes, instead of which there was absolute quiet all through the Liberal lines, and the first sign of life displayed therein was at the sound of the trumpet which summoned the council of war.

After a good deal of empty discussion, in which Miramon took but little part, the emperor asked the general:

"How long do you suppose we could hold out here, general, if the enemy trusted to a simple blockade? That is to say, how long will our provisions last, and have we enough ammunition to stand a siege, and return shot for shot?"

Miramon bowed his head slowly.

"If our only wants were those of provisions and ammunition, your majesty, we might defy the enemy. We have plenty of powder and shot, with troops enough, if we can depend on them."

He spoke the last words in such a meaning tone, that Lopez, who seemed to be touchy on the point, broke in sharply:

"And is there anything to make General Miramon suppose that we can not depend on the troops of his majesty?"

Miramon curled his lip slightly, as he replied:

"The soldiers will not fight without leaders, and there are men in our camp who do not wish to fight, if they can help it."

Lopez flushed angrily, as he retorted:

"The general speaks in riddles. He should explain himself."

The emperor, who saw, from the manner of the two men, that some ill-feeling existed between them, here interposed, quietly:

"Let us have no quarrels, gentlemen, between friends. I have perfect confidence in the faith of my officers."

Miramon turned round and looked at his sovereign in a singular manner, as he replied, slowly:

"It is well, sire, to have such confidence, if it be not like that of Caesar in Brutus. Emperors have been betrayed before this."

Lopez started forward, as if to make an angry reply; but the emperor, with his tall, stately figure, and placid, blonde face, stood between the two dark men, like a statue of peace, as he waved his hand and said in an authoritative manner:

"Gentlemen, enough of this. General Miramon, the best way to avoid these discussions is to open fire on the enemy. Let Colonel Lopez go to the batteries, and order a brisk fire on the guns that are posted on the Hill of Bells. They appear to be of light caliber, and ought to be silenced easily. Miramon will arrange a sortie, with all the troops that are available, and we will try to drive these fellows from their position."

Miramon was about to answer when a sentry, who was posted on the edge of the rampart a little distance away, shouted out:

"Flag coming! Flag coming! A parley!"

The emperor started at the sound, for it went against his notions of discipline for a soldier to make any such announcement without orders. Miramon frowned and turned toward the man with the same idea; but Colonel Lopez, who had been watching furtively all the time, cried out with an air of relief:

"It is a summons to surrender, and they will give us good terms."

"Good terms!" echoed Miramon scarily. "Ay, ay, for some of us; but how about the rest?"

The emperor checked the impending squabble between the two men, by saying decidedly:

"That is not to the point, gentlemen. This summons, before they have fairly opened fire,

must be an evidence of weakness, or a trick. In either case, it must be attended to and answered. Let Colonel Lopez go and receive the officer who is coming, and bring him here at once."

Lopez cast a triumphant glance at Miramon, who turned his head away at this evidence of the way in which his master trusted the man Miramon suspected of being in league for his betrayal; and then the colonel descended from the ramparts, and, outside the wall, found a handsome officer, in a yellow uniform, with a red sash round his waist. This officer gave his card as "Don Diablo Satani," and was conducted by the colonel straight to the top of the ramparts, to the presence of the emperor. On the way a few words, in an undertone, passed between the envoy and the colonel, who introduced him to Maximilian, and left him to do his business alone with the emperor, undisturbed by listeners.

Maximilian scanned the figure of the officer with some pleasure, for he had seldom seen a handsomer man.

A glance at the card caused him to smile, as he said:

"You have a wicked name, señor, but your face belies it."

Don Diablo smiled as he retorted:

"Your majesty knows that I am not as black as I am painted. But that is not to the purpose. I have come to offer your majesty the best terms that can be obtained from General Escobedo."

Maximilian frowned slightly, as he replied:

"I am not aware, señor, that I have asked for terms, or that the situation of affairs warrants your offering them."

Don Diablo glanced round him before he answered. Miramon was at some distance off, and Lopez out of ear-shot, as he said, in a low and confidential tone:

"If your majesty knew all, you would think differently. I assure your majesty that we do not hunger for your life, but that, if this siege goes on much longer, it will be impossible to save it. Your majesty is already betrayed by those who should be your best supporters, and who have agreed to sell your life for pardon for themselves. I implore your majesty, not being myself a Mexican, but a foreigner in their service, to take the terms I am empowered to offer to you, before it be too late."

The emperor looked surprised at the way in which the other spoke, and there was something in his own voice that approached confidence, as he asked Don Diablo:

"If you are a foreigner, of what nation are you? You speak the language too well for one."

The staff officer answered him without hesitation.

"I am an American, sire."

"An American?" echoed the Austrian, with a slight frown. "Those gentlemen have done me the honor to talk a good deal about me, and to preach some doctrine which they call by the name of one of their Presidents. It seems that they think this continent belongs to them, and that no one else is to come here, without their permission. If you are an American, you cannot surely care anything for the life of one of the members of what you call, I believe, the effete monarchies of Europe—is not that so, sir?"

The other answered him quietly:

"The Monroe doctrine is one of self-preservation, sire, and we cannot give it up without danger to ourselves. But at the same time we Americans do not believe in political murders, under the guise of executions; and we have just concluded a war in which we have not permitted a single execution; though, if the same had happened in Europe, the scaffold would have run red with blood, after the guns had ceased firing. Once more, your majesty, I implore you to listen to the terms I have to offer, and take them, while there is yet time."

The emperor was so far impressed with the earnest way in which he spoke that he answered more mildly:

"Tell me the terms, sir, and I will give you an answer."

"They are these, sire," said the other, eagerly. "The Liberal commander wishes to give your majesty a chance to escape. He will keep a slack guard, and permit your majesty to ride away in the night, to Vera Cruz, there to take refuge on board any ship of the Austrian navy that you please, and to leave the country, without molestation."

"And what of my staff and my personal friends, who have clung to my fortunes, through good report and evil?" asked the emperor.

"Your majesty can take any of them with you, without any hindrance from us," said Don Diablo, promptly. "General Escobedo will be only too glad to secure peace at any price; and your majesty is aware that you have no following, now, among the people of Mexico. The prop withdrawn, the people of Mexico have decided against you."

Maximilian uttered a heavy sigh. He could not deny the truth of what had been said; but his pride, as a prince of the house of Austria, would not permit him to accept the terms offered. So he shook his head, as he replied quietly:

"The terms are generous, considering everything, sir; but they are not admissible. The people of Mexico, through their notables, invited me to assume the crown, which I have worn for their benefit alone. If they wish to drive me forth, they must say it, through their votes. As long as there are rebels in arms, it is the duty of the emperor, as the people's representative, to fight against them to the death. You mean well, sir, but I am compelled to refuse the terms. I shall defend Queretaro to the last man that will follow me."

Don Diablo bowed silently and retired a pace, as if to signify that the interview was ended; but the prince, with the charming smile that showed the influence of his high European training, said to him:

"But before you go, sir, let me thank you, as an honorable enemy, for the sympathy you have shown toward me, and for the offer you have made me. Believe me that, if I were persuaded there was no chance for me, I would accept your offer. But there is a chance. My wife is even now in Europe, arranging for help from the powers—"

Don Diablo started at the words; and the emperor, seeing that he knew something of which Maximilian was ignorant, asked him anxiously, with a quiver in his voice that he could not conceal:

"What have you heard, sir? Has anything happened to her? I have received no news for so long that—I implore you, sir, if you have any news, good or bad, to tell me at once."

Don Diablo seemed to be affected by some strange feeling, for he hesitated to answer for a few moments, and then said slowly, as he drew from his pocket a New York newspaper:

"I know nothing, sire, but what is in here; and these telegrams are apt to be false, at any time. I entreat your majesty not to attach too much importance to it; but, at the same time, it may be true; and looking at the truth will save your majesty from trusting to those who are but rotten reeds."

So saying, he handed the emperor the paper, and turned away, leaving Maximilian staring at the heading:

"Latest from Europe The Empress Carlotta insane."

The first news that the unhappy emperor had of the illness of his beloved wife, came from the hand of an enemy, in a strange paper.

By the time he had read it, Don Diablo was back in the Mexican camp, and the battery of Millen was opening fire once more. The truce was over.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE SORTIE.

THAT day, soon after noon, the bombardment of the town of Queretaro was recommenced, but without vigor and with little effect, the batteries of the besiegers being only light field artillery, not capable of effecting a breach in walls of the thickness and strength of the town, and especially those of the Church of the Holy Cross, which had been made the citadel of the emperor.

Toward sunset the fire slackened and the emperor, who was standing on the ramparts watching the approach of the besiegers, said to General Miramon, who was beside him:

"Now, if we could only depend on our troops, we have a fine chance to make a counter-stroke at these fellows."

Miramon sighed deeply as he replied:

"That is the worst, your majesty—if we could depend on them. But, from what I have seen, there is no dependence to be placed on them in a fight. The game seems to be up, and if we get a fair chance to escape, the best thing for your majesty to do is to take it and ride for Vera Cruz, where there are foreign men-of-war whose commanders will give you an asylum."

Maximilian frowned deeply.

"I came here on the invitation of the Mexican people, through their notables, and they gave me the crown freely. If I were to fly to save my own life, I should give color to all that has been said about my being a foreign prince, upheld by foreign bayonets. Live or die, I have become a Mexican, and live for Mexico. If the people do not want me, let them say so and take my life. I am not conscious of having done anything, save what was done for the glory and advantage of the country which I have made my own."

Then he added:

"That officer who came with the flag of truce this morning was a fine-looking fellow and deserves to be on a better side than he is now. He actually behaved like a gentleman when he spoke to me, though he came to demand a surrender before a breach had been made in the walls."

Miramon was silent, gloomily thinking of the future, and the emperor continued musingly:

"When this is all over, Miramon, I wonder what the world will say of us in history?"

Miramon shook his head, as he answered:

"History has nothing but reproaches for those who get the worst of a battle, sire. We

can but make our fate respectable by dying like soldiers."

The emperor drew from his bosom the paper which had been given him by the Mexican envoy, and said quietly:

"Miramon, that time has come for us. Read that, and you will see that our hopes are vain."

He had retained his calmness ever since the first reading of the paper which had brought him such ill news, and had given no outward token of the disturbance that oppressed him; but now, as he handed the same paper to his faithful follower, he broke down for an instant, and as he turned his back on Miramon muttered those words which he was to repeat at his death:

"Poor Carlotta!"

It was his only word of repining at his hard fate, and Miramon heard it with a sense of desolation that nothing else had brought to him. Hardened old revolutionist as the general was, he had never before been brought in contact with a character like that of Maximilian, the simple nobility and unselfishness of which had completely taken him captive. He scanned the paper which brought the ill news, and then said slowly:

"That is the end of all, sire. We shall be better off than the empress, for our troubles will be over in a short time; but hers will last till it pleases the good God to release her from this life of sorrow."

The emperor made no reply save to wring the hand of the other in silence, and then walked away to the end of the rampart, where he found Lopez gazing at the enemies' batteries, as if he enjoyed the prospect. The batteries on the ramparts of the church inclosure were replying feebly, and the siege seemed as if it languished for want of ammunition or spirit, but Lopez looked round to say to his master, cheerfully:

"If they can do no better than this, sire, we shall beat them off yet, I think."

Maximilian inclined his head gravely, as he replied:

"We could do it easily, if we had but a little spirit. What say you to heading a sally from the walls?"

Lopez looked frightened, as he hastily said:

"It would be too dangerous, sire. Suppose they should drive us back and get possession of the gates! We might be taken by surprise before we could devise a proper resistance."

"Nevertheless," said the emperor, still more gravely, "I do not think that it becomes the Emperor of Mexico to stay here, and be taken like a rat in a trap, without a fight. Order out all the men that are available, and we will do what we can."

Lopez made no answer but a salute, and within half an hour from that time the gates were thrown open, and a heavy fire was brought to bear from the ramparts of the church inclosure on the besiegers outside; while a strong body of troops made a rush for Millen's battery on the Hill of Bells, which the emperor had decided to be the key of the position.

Miramon led the sally, and the emperor himself was only dissuaded from going with it by the general, who represented that his life was too valuable to be sacrificed in battle.

The Austrian prince yielded, but as the column departed the last words he said to Miramon were:

"The time is not far distant when I may be sorry that I did not go with you, and fall as a soldier should on the field."

His words were prophetic, though at the time no one suspected it. The sally was successful so far that the column reached the Hill of Bells in safety, and compelled Millen to limber up his guns and take to flight in confusion, the support on which he had calculated from the Mexicans giving way and fleeing like sheep.

Miramon actually thought that he had a chance of victory, and pursued his advantage to the utmost, traversing the camp of the Juarists, and driving horse and foot a distance of near a mile before his progress was checked.

Then the extreme advance, that had hitherto experienced no serious resistance, found itself confronted for the first time by a line of men who stood firm and fired rapidly, causing severe loss in the ranks of the Imperialists.

The march of the column was checked, and the men extended into a line to oppose the others, when to their astonishment the opposing line suddenly lowered bayonets and charged headlong with a wild yell, such as had never been heard in Mexico before.

In front of the line could be seen a flag beside the standard of Mexico, which was instantly recognized by the Imperialists, and which accounted for the unexpected spirit of the assault.

A great cry arose of "Los Yanquis! Los Yanquis!" and from that moment all the influence of Miramon, great as it was, could not keep his men to their work. Bit by bit, the lately gallant soldiers gave back, and the colors of the American Regiment waved in triumph on the top of the Hill of Bells, just as Millen came galloping up, with the guns he had saved by his timely retreat.

The sally, that had driven the whole Juarist army in confusion, was checked by the return onset of a single regiment; and the emperor, looking down from the rampart, murmured sadly:

"Oh, if I had but such soldiers as that, in my army, I could stay here forever."

He saw his own men, who had swept out so bravely, coming back in a demoralized mob, followed by the skirmishers of the American Regiment, yelling and firing as they came, headed by a brilliant figure in a yellow uniform, in which the emperor recognized the staff officer who had come in under a flag of truce, that morning.

Don Diablo was on horseback, waving his sword, a conspicuous object in the midst of the confusion; but he seemed to bear a charmed life from the way in which he remained unhurt, in the midst of a fire under which men were dropping like leaves in autumn.

The emperor was finally compelled to go down to the gate himself, and personally take out a battery of artillery, to protect the retreat of his own men, before they could regain the shelter of the fortress they had left so gaily.

When at last they were all in, he found that the sally had cost him, in killed, wounded and missing, more than five hundred men, while the survivors were so much demoralized that it would be impossible to get them out again, from the shelter of the fortifications.

Reluctantly he was compelled to acknowledge to himself that the question of the fall of Queretaro had become merely one of time, and that, in the end, he must succumb. His men would not fight for him, and the American Regiment, by its very name and reputation, had completely cowed them all.

In this frame of mind, he saw the sun set, and called together his staff for a last consultation.

CHAPTER XXVII. THE COLONEL'S RECORD.

COLONEL BROOKE, his face flushed with pleasure, stood by the guns of the battery his regiment had rescued, while General Escobedo, in presence of all his staff, thanked him for the service the American Regiment had rendered, and for "driving the usurper back to his hole, in the gardens of Queretaro."

Brooke had not behaved badly in the battle—that is to say, he had encouraged his men to advance, though he had kept behind them; and when they reached the summit of the Hill of Bells, and the battery opened fire again, he was up with the rest of them.

Nevertheless, he was aware that the man who had led the charge, in advance of the whole regiment, exposing himself in the most reckless manner, so that all the soldiers adored him, had been the staff officer of Escobedo, in the yellow uniform; the very man he had most reason to fear and hate at the moment.

But as soon as the triumph had been accomplished, this officer had disappeared, and now he was not to be seen, even in the midst of Escobedo's staff, where Brooke had expected him to be found.

And this it was, perhaps, which made him unusually modest and silent, while the general was praising him for what he called the "heroic way in which he had led his regiment to action."

He was well aware that his own men knew the difference, for there are none so quick to see the conduct of their officers as American soldiers; and the way in which the unknown staff officer had exposed himself in their front had had its effect on the men of the American Regiment, who were looking for him everywhere.

This became apparent in a moment more, when the officer himself, who had been absent, came up in the rear of the general, and was greeted with a tumultuous cheering which surprised Escobedo, who could not at first understand its cause, and looked round him in surprise to see what was the matter.

Don Diablo rode quietly up and saluted his chief, while the men of the American Regiment broke ranks and cheered louder than before, so that the general asked Brooke:

"What is the matter with your men, señor? They are usually the quietest in the camp, and to-day they seem to have gone mad."

Brooke colored and stammered that "he supposed it was because they were glad to see the general, and that it was the custom of the American soldiers to cheer their generals, when they saw them."

Escobedo smiled at the flattery, which he swallowed without difficulty, and the scene would have ended there, had not one of the soldiers in the ranks shouted out:

"Three cheers for the Mad Magician, boys! He may be crazy, but he's a fighter, and that's what we want, just now."

Escobedo heard and understood, and seemed puzzled, as he asked:

"Señor Brooke, who is this Mad Magician, that they talk of?"

Brooke could make no answer, so much was he mortified; while Don Diablo, with a smile on his handsome face, gave no assistance to him in

his dilemma; and it was left for Colonel Davol, the second in command, to say to the general:

"The men are shouting for one of your staff officers, general. The one they call Don Diablo Satani; he it was who led our charge, and gave it most of its weight."

Escobedo looked still more puzzled, as he asked:

"And why the name? Don Diablo is no magician, and he is not mad."

Davol shrugged his shoulders, as he said:

"As for being mad, I know not; but I will answer for his being one of the most skillful magicians that I ever saw. It is not possible that you do not know that, general? At El Paso he did things I never saw done before, and puzzled all of us."

The general turned to Satani, to say with a smile:

"How is this, that you have been hiding your light under a bushel all this time? I had no idea that you possessed so many accomplishments as this gentleman asserts."

The pale face of Don Diablo never changed, as he replied:

"The gentleman does me too much honor. I have a few feeble talents, which are entirely at your excellency's service, but they are not so great as he represents. In the mean time, general, Colonel Brooke has a paper to present to you, which he promised to give you before the sun sets, which will explain a good deal that I cannot do, without telling a long story."

Brooke turned paler than before, as he stammered:

"Me? A paper! You are mistaken, sir. I have no paper to—"

And he stopped, while Crocker, who had been watching him closely, ever since the staff officer had come up, touched Davol's arm, and took him to one side, where he whispered:

"Something crooked here, Davol; but I'm hanged if I can see what it is. The chief has some secret in his past life, which makes him afraid of that man; and I begin to think there is a crime hidden in his demeanor."

Davol, in the same tone, answered:

"No business of ours, anyway. It will be sure to come out soon; and for my part I don't think our chief is quite the man we thought him, when we elected him colonel. He didn't show the grit that I like in a man, when we were advancing. I like a fellow who says 'Come on, boys!' instead of getting in the rear and shouting 'Go on, you scoundrels!' Is that the way you used to do in the Confederate army?"

Crocker flamed up in a moment, as he retorted angrily:

"Not a bit of it, as you Yanks ought to know by this time. But I own Brooke hasn't panned out as well as I expected. The fact is he was not in the army of Northern Virginia, and we took him on his reputation, which came to us largely from rumor."

"Where did he come from?" asked Davol.

Crocker smiled, with a spice of malice as he said:

"From New York, I believe, originally. So you see that it will not do to set down any of his short-comings to the account of the South, friend Davol."

Davol smiled, for he had no sensitiveness on the score of the valor of the respective sections of the Union, but he could not help the little thrust—

"No, the South has sins enough of its own to answer for, I believe, Crocker, so we can let her slide. New York City, I suppose you mean he came from, that was always half Southern in its make-up before the war, and did all it could to help the South while it lasted. But we must find out what is the matter with Brooke. You can help me to do this. When did he first come South, do you know?"

Crocker shook his head as he said:

"I don't know, exactly; but I can find out for you. He came to us from the West, and his record is in my papers. He was in Kirby Smith's army, which was the last to surrender, you know."

Davol looked a little disturbed at what the adjutant said, and replied hastily:

"Perhaps it would not be exactly the thing for me to begin an investigation into the past record of my commanding officer. People might say I wanted to get the regiment by foul play; but at the same time, Crocker—"

"At the same time," assented the adjutant, "we don't want a man representing us who has a blot in his record. I am going to find out what it is, and if it is what I think, out of the regiment he goes, by hook or by crook."

As he said this he noticed that General Escobedo, who had been talking apart to Satani and the colonel, took leave of the latter with marked coldness, saying, as he went:

"I shall look for the paper to-night, Señor Colonel."

CHAPTER XXVIII. THE NEWSPAPER.

THE night had closed in over the city of Queretaro and the camp of the besiegers when George Brooke was pacing his tent, his face set in an anxious frown, while the disjointed words that escaped from his lips showed that he was in

great agitation of mind and body, his disturbance actually producing physical pain.

The sweat rolled off his forehead and down his temples, while the corrugation of his forehead showed that he was suffering some secret torture.

"Oh," he muttered at last, "why did I not kill him when I had the chance in safety?"

His meditations were interrupted here by a tap at the canvas of the tent, and he hastily cried:

"Who is there?"

The voice of the adjutant replied:

"It is I, colonel."

The colonel, with an air of relief, said at once:

"Come in, Crocker. What is it? The roll-call?"

The adjutant entered the tent quietly and his face was so grave that the colonel, with a faltering voice, said to him:

"Why, what is the matter, Crocker?"

The adjutant held in his hand a newspaper, which he extended to his commanding officer, saying in the grave tone which suited his face and air:

"I have come, colonel, on behalf of all the officers, to ask if you know the contents of this journal?"

Brooke trembled perceptibly as he took the paper and glanced at the heading, saying:

"Why, what is this? An old paper. Why, this is four years old, sir. How am I to know what is in it?"

"If you have no objection, colonel, you can read the marked column and tell us whether that is the same person that we think it is."

The voice of the adjutant was calm but stern, and his commanding officer turned paler and paler as he listened.

But he forced a laugh as he said:

"Why, certainly, Crocker, if you wish. But what am I to look at, and what is the particular crime you accuse me of?"

Crocker compressed his lips.

"I am not aware that any one has accused you of any crime," he said dryly. "That is a matter for yourself to settle, colonel. All we ask is, whether you are the George Brooke mentioned in that paragraph or not?"

And as he extended the paper to Brooke with one hand he pointed with the forefinger of the other to an article, nearly a column in length, heralded by a staring display-heading.

Brooke looked at the article indicated as if he had never seen it before, but the way in which the paper shook as he handled it showed that his ignorance was assumed, and the keen-sighted adjutant perceived it instantly.

The article was headed:

"A WEDDING INTERRUPTED! STARTLING STORY OF CRIME IN HIGH LIFE!"

and ran on from sentence to sentence in the true reportorial style, piling adjective on adjective.

Crocker watched his chief as he read it slowly and saw that he affected to be perusing it, though his eye frequently wandered from the paper to the floor.

He took a long time to read or pretend to read it, and when he was forced to look up at last, he said to Crocker with a forced smile that became him ill:

"Well, what has that to do with me, sir?"

Crocker bit his lip.

"That is just what we wish to know, sir. Of course, if you are prepared to give us your word that you are not the person mentioned in that article the thing goes no further; but—"

"And suppose," interrupted the colonel, with an attempt at haughty composure, "that I do not choose to say anything on the subject at all; what then, Mr. Crocker? I believe I am colonel."

The adjutant colored slightly as he replied:

"In that case, sir, I am desired, by the officers of this regiment, to return and tell them your decision at once."

Brooke frowned as he retorted hastily:

"It strikes me, Mr. Crocker, that this savors very much of a mutinous combination. What business have the officers of my regiment with the private doings of their colonel, sir?"

"Only this, sir," returned the adjutant, as haughtily as himself, "that we are not under the laws of the United States, or the Confederate States either, but under those of the Republic of Mexico; and that we shall appeal to General Escobedo, who is apprised of the tenor of this article, to cancel your commission at once, and to turn over the command to Colonel Davol or Major Hardenkopf, as soon as possible. We did not take service voluntarily to be compelled to obey a man we cannot respect."

Brooke bit his lip at the unexpected assault, for he had fancied the adjutant on his side, altogether.

"Never mind that, Mr. Crocker," he said, in a constrained way. "I am of course aware that gentlemen and men of honor are not to rest quiet under the accusations contained in such a statement as that in this paper without any defense. Well, sir, you can tell the officers of the regi-

ment that, out of consideration for *their* feelings, and for other reasons, I answer the accusation. I am *not* the person named in the article. I know the animus of the man who has given it to you to read, and I will expose it at the proper time. He is a fellow called Horace Arnold, who was sent to State's Prison for a burglary committed on his own father, and he has never forgiven me because, being his next of kin, I inherited the money of the very father he sought to rob. That is all, sir."

His tones were so dignified and grave that Crocker was for a moment taken aback, and Brooke, seeing the advantage he had obtained, went on in the same way:

"I am glad to give the officers this assurance, Mr. Crocker; the more so, that this matter has been on my mind for some time. I have felt a good deal of pain to observe that a good many of my officers seem to have been disposed to believe, without any sufficient evidence, the accusations of this man Arnold; but I can assure them that, if I have not, before this, come out and denounced him, it is only because we are connected by ties of blood, and I cannot expose him without giving scandal to innocent people, whom he has injured. That is all, sir. Good-night."

And he led the adjutant to the door of the tent, and dismissed him there, with the authoritative air of a colonel, so that Crocker actually found himself outside the tent before he knew where he was, with all his suspicions unsatisfied.

The honest soldier shook his head in the dark, and walked off in the direction of Major Hardenkopf's tent, muttering to himself:

"Well, by Jove, this is a queer thing."

Meanwhile the man inside the tent, the instant the other had gone, resumed his uneasy walk. The constraint he had put on himself while Crocker was there had vanished, and he wrung his hands as he said, half to himself, half to something unseen, that he apostrophized:

"Oh, my God, where is all this to end?"

The air returned no answer, and Brooke continued to pace the tent till the trumpets, piercing the night air outside, told of the hour of tattoo. As the last notes sounded, he heard a second rap on the canvas, in a sharp, imperative manner that caused him to ask:

"Who is there now?"

"Captain Roblado, from General Escobedo," was the reply, as the tent door was opened and a Mexican officer entered.

He was attired in the buff-leather uniform of the staff, and his manner was curt and imperious, as he said to Brooke:

"The general wishes to see you at once, in his tent, sir."

"I will come," said Brooke, stiffly. "Give me time to put on my side-arms and dress uniform, and I will come at once."

Captain Roblado shrugged his shoulders.

"As you please; but I should recommend you to hurry. The general is in no mood to wait."

"He will have to wait for me, though," said Brooke, obstinately, as he began to dress with unusual care.

His face was paler than usual; for he foresaw that a struggle was imminent, in which he was likely to get the worst of it; but he had made up his mind, after being driven into a corner, that he would do his best to fight, and would not give up tamely.

"After all," he said to himself, "the man has no *proof* of anything that concerns these Mexicans; and if he tells all the old story they will only laugh at him. They are different from these high-spirited men from the Confederacy. Wish I had known which side was going to win. I would not have been in this state, to-day. But who in the world would have suspected that Horace Arnold should turn up, here, of all places in the world, and in such a capacity? It beats everything."

By that time he had assumed his best uniform and buckled on his sword, taking his way to the tent of the commander-in-chief, whom he found awaiting him, walking up and down the tent, and who saluted him with the forbidding greeting:

"Well, sir, you have kept me waiting nearly ten minutes."

Brooke bowed respectfully but coldly, as he replied:

"I made all the haste I could, your excellency, but I could not come till I had put on my dress uniform."

Then he added, in the same cold manner:

"To what do I owe the honor of this summons?"

Escobedo eyed him doubtfully for a moment, as he answered:

"Your regiment will be assigned to the attack on Queretaro, to-night, and you will get under arms at once."

CHAPTER XXIX.

MUSTERING FOR THE ASSAULT.

THE summons was a sensible relief for Brooke, who had had a vague expectation that some new form of the persecution, to which he had lately been subjected, was coming. He bowed and stammered, in some confusion:

"I am much honored by the commission, your excellency. Is there to be a night assault?"

The general shook his head.

"No need of such a thing. You are subject to the orders of Don Diablo Satani, who will conduct the column, and he will tell you what to do."

Brooke hesitated.

"Is there no other officer of your staff that can be placed in the command?" he asked, slowly. "Your excellency is aware that the gentleman you speak of and myself are on bad terms; and that your excellency's orders would be better carried out by assigning to the duty two people who would work together, better than Don Diablo and myself possibly can."

Escobedo nodded.

"Exactly. By the by, I suppose you have got that paper ready, of which Don Diablo spoke to me?"

"On the contrary, sir, I have no paper; and I do not propose to give any," replied Brooke, boldly. "I had the honor to assure your excellency that Don Diablo had given you a false—"

The general turned round on him suddenly, saying sharply:

"Take care what you say, sir. Don Diablo is in the next tent, and if his honor is attacked, he will be sure to resent it, and I shall not stand between you and him."

Brooke curled his lip as he answered:

"That is very true, sir; but I am not asking indulgence for my words. I can maintain them, in any place. Don Diablo, when he said that I had a paper to give to you, asserted what was not true."

The general nodded as if satisfied, and called out:

"Don Diablo, do you hear that?"

He had turned his head toward an inner tent, and the words were followed by the sound of a person moving a chair on a board floor, while the curtains were parted, and Don Diablo Satani came forth from the inner tent and said, quietly:

"I heard, general, and I assert, on the contrary, that only last night this gentleman promised, on his faith as a Christian, to give to your excellency a paper, which was to be a full confession of the crimes of which he has been guilty toward me and other persons. If he denies it now, so much the worse for him. Repentance and sorrow might wipe away the crimes of the past; but, as it is, they must be exposed to the light of day. I am ready, whenever your excellency gives the order, to lead the column to Queretaro."

He did not so much as look at Brooke, who was manifestly uneasy under his presence, but who assumed an air of relief as he heard the staff officer give up, for the present, the idea of forcing him to sign a confession of his crimes, whatever they might have been.

Escobedo looked puzzled for a moment, and then said, briskly:

"Well, well, that can be settled later. In the mean time, it is important that nothing in this expedition should fail for want of proper cooperation from both of you. Don Diablo, do you think you can work with this gentleman, and he with you?"

The staff officer bowed.

"There will be no difficulty on my part. All I ask of this gentleman is that he obeys orders, and we shall hold none but official communication together."

The general nodded approvingly, as he replied:

"That is right. Official relations are different from private ones; and I can get on perfectly well with a man I hate to the death as long as we are put on duty together. These are the orders, gentlemen: Don Diablo will have the command of the column, which will consist of the American Regiment, supported by the regiment of Chihuahua and Don Jaime Mileno's battery. The guns are to be drawn by hand, so as to make the least possible noise, and you are to seize the town and church inclosure as silently as possible. It is expected that you will be masters of the place by sunrise."

Brooke listened intently, and asked him formally:

"Is Don Diablo superior in rank to myself, general, that he is put in *command* over me and other troops? I ask because I have reason to believe that I have more experience in action than he has, and that I may be better fitted for command than he."

Escobedo stared at him as if he hardly believed his ears, and then retorted, with an accent of some scorn:

"Señor Brooke, is it usual, in the American service, for the subordinate officer to dispute the official orders of their superiors? I merely ask for information."

Brooke colored deeply, but his tone was haughty, as he replied:

"In the American service, general, a man is never put under his junior in rank; and the commander of a regiment is never put in subordination to a simple staff officer."

"Not even if that staff officer holds a commission which makes him rank the commander of a regiment?" asked Escobedo, quietly.

Brooke started slightly as he replied:

"Well, no, I don't go as far as that, general."

But this officer has surely not such a commission as that."

"Since when does your own commission date, señor?" asked the general, in the coldest of tones.

Brooke replied:

"Since we left El Paso, general."

"And when does *your* commission date, Don Diablo?" asked the general, quietly turning to Satani.

The staff officer calmly took from his breast-pocket a big envelope, which he passed to Brooke, remarking:

"The colonel can see for himself, general, that it dates from last year, just after the end of the American war."

Brooke took the commission as if it had been made of red-hot iron instead of innocent paper, and found, as Don Diablo had said, that it was dated in the summer of 1865, soon after the end of the civil war in which he himself had served.

He looked at it gloomily, and then handed it back, with the remark to Escobedo:

"I see, general, and it is all-sufficient. It is just as well to have these things settled. Now I shall have no hesitation in obeying the orders that Colonel Satani gives me."

A faint smile crossed the face of Satani as the other spoke, and the general said, with an air of satisfaction:

"There, that is settled now. I apprehend that you will have no trouble in getting in and taking the town; but remember that, if there is any slip-up of the plans, the whole army is ready to support you, so that the regiment in advance will not be sacrificed. Good-night, Colonel Brooke. Don Diablo is competent to attend to all the rest of the affair to-night."

And he bowed them out, Brooke following the man he now knew to be his superior, with a sense that all was getting to be very much as he did not want it to be.

The other, when they were outside, made no allusion to the private affairs in which they were both concerned; but merely said to Brooke, as he turned his back on him:

"Get your regiment under arms at midnight, without any trumpets or drums, and be ready to march light. The men will not need their knapsacks or anything but a water-bottle, and fifty rounds. The muskets will not be loaded without orders, and the bayonet will be trusted to, till positive orders are given to fire. That is all, sir. I shall expect your adjutant to report to me at half-past eleven in front of this tent."

So saying, he turned away, and Brooke, feeling as if the whole thing were as much of a dream as ever, went to his own tent and gave Crocker the orders he had just received from the very man who had come to his bedside so mysteriously, and whose character was still an enigma to him, as well as his position in the Mexican army.

Crocker was delighted at the idea of active service, and especially of night service with the bayonet, in what might prove to be a desperate and daring assault.

Brooke, who knew better what was likely to be the outcome of the expedition, was by no means depressed at the prospect. He was not in love with desperate assaults, but this one promised to be a merely victorious march, in which the American Regiment was to have the post of honor, and all the credit that could be got out of the affair.

The hum of preparation was soon heard, as the sergeants went through the camp, rousing the men from their first naps, and telling them to get ready for a fight at once. The summons was gladly heard, for the men of the American Regiment were already heartily tired of the inactive life they had led since they came to Queretaro, and were willing to run into danger to escape another day in the blistering sunshine of Mexico, with nothing to do to pass away the time but playing at cards, with no money for stakes.

By half-past eleven Crocker was able to go to the general's tent to report, and there he found Don Diablo waiting, with his sword under his arm, while the bayonets of a regiment of Mexicans gleamed in the starlight behind him, and the dark outlines of horses and guns showed that the battery was waiting its turn.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE NIGHT MARCH.

"TELL Colonel Brooke to march his men here and take charge of the guns," said the staff officer. "We are to drag them in by hand, and the Americans are sent first because the general trusts them to hold their tongues better than the Mexicans."

Crocker saluted and turned away, reporting to the colonel, who growled a good deal at the indignity put on him by "turning his men into draggers of cannon," but finally obeyed the order.

The American Regiment came marching silently up, and the horses were taken from the guns of the battery, ropes being furnished the men by which the guns were to be dragged by hand to the assault.

Then Don Diablo gave the order to advance and

the whole column stole off through the darkness toward the flank of the camp, no one knowing where they were going.

They had expected to be taken under the walls of Queretaro, but the staff officer led them by a long détour, which took them an hour to traverse and which made the men tired on account of the ups and downs in the road, which was rocky and uneven.

At last they turned toward the walls of Queretaro and halted in a grove of trees not very far from the western end of the town, where a gate was known to be situated.

The men were told to observe strict silence, and Don Diablo went off alone toward the town on foot.

Colonel Brooke was left in command, with strict orders not to move the men out or to allow any smoking or talking till the return of the leader.

Brooke did not like the subordinate rôle assigned to him, but he obeyed orders, the rather that the officers of his regiment kept aloof from him, with marked coldness, and showed that the explanation made to Crocker had not satisfied them. The contents of the paper which had reached him so mysteriously, by what channel he did not yet know, had changed all their minds toward him.

The sense of isolation at last became so painful that he said to Major Hardenkopf, who happened to be near him:

"What is the matter, major?"

The German shrugged his shoulders, answering:

"V'ot should be de madders mit us, colonel? De order vas not to speak, and ve vas obey dem. Dot Satani he know his peesness, I guess."

"He knows how to slander other people," replied Brooke, sharply. "You need not deny it, major. I know that scoundrel has poisoned your minds against me, and I'll get even with him yet, when this trouble is over with us."

"V'at drouble vas you mean?" asked Hardenkopf, innocently.

"This siege, or whatever you call it," retorted Brooke, savagely. "I saw that infamous newspaper paragraph that Crocker showed me, and it is an infamous lie, all through. I never had anything to do with the matter, and it is only a similarity of names that has led him to do me this injustice."

The stolid German shrugged his shoulders again, as he replied:

"Dot vas all right, colonel. You know v'at vas in dot baper?"

"Crocker showed it to me, and I saw something about a man of my name who was said to have done something very discreditable to a man of the name of Arnold," said Brooke, uneasily.

Hardenkopf chuckled slightly as he retorted:

"Yah! Dot vas de very thing, colonel. Dot man Brooke—I do not say dot you vas de same man—but dot man Brooke in de baper, he vas a doorty scoundrel—vas he not, now? He vas such a coward, you know, sooch a v'at you call a *dead-beat*; is not dot de Benglesh?"

He seemed to take a pleasure in enlarging on the wickedness of this other Brooke and asking the colonel's opinion on the subject, so that Brooke, writhing inwardly at the necessity, replied:

"Well, what of that, if I am not the same man? Besides, I don't see that what he did was so cowardly."

Hardenkopf uttered an exclamation of wonder, as he cried:

"Ach Gott! V'at vas dot you say, colonel? V'y, dot man vas de most doorty of cowards! Deed you not read v'at he deed? You cannot haf paid attention to it, or you would not say so."

Here Davol, who had been lingering near them, listening to the conversation, with several other officers, said quietly:

"I really cannot see how any man of honor could say that the conduct of the Brooke in the paper, whoever he may be, is not in the worst degree culpable and dishonorable."

Brooke turned on his heel and walked away for a moment, and then came back to the group of officers, to whom he said, in a voice that struggled with his passion:

"Gentlemen, you appear to take great pleasure in talking on this subject, when the very name of it is disagreeable to me. I have told you, already, that I am not the person in that paper, and yet you persist in bringing it up before me."

"Your name is George Brooke, isn't it?" cried a voice in the rear, "and we all know that you came from New York just about the time mentioned in that paper."

"Who says so?" asked Brooke, furiously. "Let the man come forth and we will see who is my enemy here."

But as there was no answer he contented himself with the defiance:

"I say it is all false, and a plot to injure me."

Further dispute was prevented by the approach of Don Diablo, who was seen coming back toward the soldiers, and who issued orders for the column to take up its march again.

Once more they stole silently out of the grove and skirted the walls of Queretaro till they arrived in the vicinity of the gate at which they expected to obtain entrance.

Here another halt was called, and Don Diablo fell back to the head of the American Regiment to say to Brooke, before his officers:

"Give me a company in front. Let the guns follow us closely, and the rest of the regiment come behind."

Brooke nodded to Crocker to give the order, and the first company of the American Regiment went forward with the staff officer, taking a quicker pace, and leaving a considerable interval between themselves and the rest of the regiment.

Brooke let them go forward, and then, as the guns were about to follow with the rest of his men, he said sharply:

"Halt! Who ordered you to stir? I believe I command this regiment at present. When I have been dismissed it will be time for you handy gentlemen to take command, in your turn."

The angry tone in which he spoke had its effect, and the movement which had commenced was stopped, while the distance between the regiment and the advance company increased every moment.

The night was by this time far advanced, and the moon, which was in its last quarter, had just risen, so that the progress of the company, which had gone with Don Diablo, was plainly visible from the regiment itself.

On they went toward the foot of the ramparts, and the faint light of the moon shone on their bayonets as they approached the gate, which was to be opened to them by the traitor Lopez.

Still the American Regiment kept in its place, till Davol, who was growing uneasy at the gap between the advance company and its supports, ventured to say to Brooke:

"Had we not best go on, colonel? If there is any trouble at the gate we shall be needed."

Brooke's only reply was:

"I believe I command this regiment, sir."

And Davol stepped back, frowning at the cold way in which he had been addressed, but hesitating whether to make open trouble.

At last some one was seen coming back at a run from the advance body of men, and a Mexican officer hurried up, saying:

"Why do you not advance, gentlemen? Don Diablo orders an immediate advance. The enemy desire to have an excuse to surrender to force, and may resist, if they do not see plenty of men before the gate."

Brooke, in the same obstinate way he had preserved all through, made answer to the messenger:

"Go back and tell Don Diablo that I understand my business, and don't intend to run my regiment into a trap."

The Mexican angrily retorted:

"There is no trap. This is a positive order. Will you advance your regiment or not?"

"Not till I think proper," returned Brooke, still more angrily. "Let him take his city alone, if he can."

The Mexican—he was a young officer who had come with Satani—was too much astonished to do more than return whence he had come, to give the astounding intelligence that the second in command refused to obey orders; and as he went off, a murmur rose among the officers of the American Regiment, when the suspense was put an end to by the sudden flash of a cannon at the gate, and the hum of a shot over their heads.

Davol and Hardenkopf at once drew their swords, and shouted to the men, disregarding Brooke's presence:

"FORWARD!"

The American Regiment broke into a run with a loud yell, and swept forward to the foot of the wall, where they found the gate open, and a whole battery of guns beginning to fire.

But, strange to say, the shot from these guns was sent high over their heads, and did not hurt a man in the assaulting column. It swept on at a run; entered the fortifications of the city of Queretaro, and within half an hour had mastered the whole place, and driven the few defenders who did their duty into the inclosure of the Church of the Holy Cross, the whole circuit of which was occupied by the Liberals; while the American Regiment and its supports were in positions from which they could command every window.

As the sun rose, a flag of truce was hung out from the church.

CHAPTER XXXI.

TERMS OF SURRENDER.

THE appearance of the flag of truce was greeted by a loud cheer from the soldiers of all regiments that thronged the city of Queretaro, and none cheered louder than the very men who had treacherously surrendered, the night before, after a pretense of fighting which had deceived nobody.

The guns that had been fired, as the Liberals entered the gates, had been purposely sighted high, and the appearance of resistance had only been made to hide the treason of Colonel Lopez.

Nevertheless, there was still left the church,

with its formidable inclosure of high walls, within which was the emperor himself, with a small body of soldiers, and Miramon, with a few Mexican officers, who, knowing that they had no chance if they surrendered without terms, were disposed to resist to the last and to sacrifice their lives, if necessary, in a battle, rather than to submit tamely to being slaughtered like sheep.

The moment the flag was hung out, General Escobedo, who had entered the town with the soldiers, as soon as he found it entirely safe, caused a trumpet to sound a suspension of firing, and rode up to the gate of the inclosure to demand its surrender.

He was warned, by a loud voice from within, to "keep out of gunshot or he would be killed," a warning which caused him to beat a retreat with more haste than dignity.

Then he went straight to Don Diablo Satani, to whom he said:

"Go and give them what terms you please. But, above all, let the usurper escape, if it can be done without the soldiers knowing of the permission."

Satani nodded as if he understood, and said to his chief, in a low voice of confidence:

"I understand. You cannot guarantee his life."

"No, no," hastily returned the general, with an apprehensive look, for fear they might be overheard. "The army demands his death; but the foreign governments may make trouble about it. If he escapes, it will be all right. There must be plenty of ways by which it can be arranged. Surely he will not persist in being executed like a criminal."

Don Diablo considered a moment, and then said slowly:

"It will have to be done in the night time; for there is no hope of escaping the vigilance of the soldiers, if they can see him."

Escobedo eagerly nodded as he replied:

"That is the way. Grant him a suspension of hostilities till the night, and give out that we are arranging for a complete surrender of everything to-morrow. That will blind them to what is being done. But above all, let there be no disturbance."

"There shall be none, if I have my own way," replied Satani. "At the same time, your excellency, it is my duty to tell you that I have had trouble with this American Regiment, and that the colonel will not obey orders without great difficulty. He nearly spoiled all the plans, last night, by his disobedience."

Escobedo frowned, as he answered:

"We should have got on better, I sometimes think, without these Americans. One cannot do with them as with our own men. They insist on fighting, when we can win by diplomacy. But we must manage to keep them civil, as long as we need them. If the usurper gets out into the country, and raises troops, as he can easily do, in some parts of the republic, he will give us trouble yet. If I put him under arrest, this American colonel, who will take his place?"

"His second in command, who comes from a different place. But it will not be necessary, general. I have told you of the trouble, that you may not trust too much to the regiment. After the siege is over it can be disbanded."

"I should like to disband it now," grumbled the general. "These Americans think no one can fight save themselves. But we are losing time, Don Diablo. Take a flag, and treat with the usurper."

The staff officer saluted and went away to the gate of the inclosure where, as soon as he presented himself, he was received and admitted into the church itself, being first blindfolded.

The besiegers had been retired out of gunshot of the walls, and a truce had come over the firing, the more so that there was no room for artillery to be brought up to the gates, except in a position where it would have to be exposed to a heavy fire of musketry, and a hard fight must ensue for the ultimate victory. And the Liberals wanted nothing less than a fight, now that they had their enemy in a trap from which there was no escape, as they thought.

Don Diablo was conducted into the defenses, and when the bandage was removed from his eyes he found himself in the midst of a large, darkened church, before the high altar. The windows of this church were stuffed full of sandbags, and the whole place was in a condition of defense very creditable to the experience of Miramon, who commanded the little garrison that was left.

Colonel Lopez, who had betrayed the town, had vanished, and Satani knew that he was ostensibly a prisoner to the Liberals, who had treated him with pretended severity on purpose to hide the fact that they had won the town by treason instead of hard fighting.

General Miramon was the only person visible when Don Diablo opened his eyes, and his stern query was:

"Well, sir; and what do you want with us?"

The envoy looked round the darkened church a moment, and then said quietly:

"I wish to see the commander of the Imperialist forces."

"You see him," was the short reply. "What do you wish with him?"

"To offer terms for an honorable surrender," said Satani.

Miramón uttered a bitter laugh as he retorted:

"And who is to guarantee that the terms will be observed? I am not ignorant of the fact that my own life is not worth a single real if once I surrender to these brigands and cut-throats that call themselves Liberals. If I must die, it is better to die sword in hand than to be murdered."

"Nevertheless," said Satani, gravely, "I come from General Escobedo, with power to offer terms, and even if your own life is in danger, general, you have no right to forfeit the lives of the meanest of your soldiers, if your surrender, when it has become a necessity, will preserve them."

Miramón compressed his lips with an air of pain as he answered:

"You give me credit for a good deal more generosity than most men can afford to entertain, sir. What comfort will it be to me, if I am executed, to think that other men get their lives?"

Don Diablo replied with the same gravity as before:

"You will have the satisfaction of doing a good action, and that is what a man needs in the shadow of death. But there is no need of dying at all. We are alone, sir, and none can hear us. I can assure you that the general wishes to see you and the emperor escape if it can be arranged in a way that will show he is not an accessory to the fact. We both know the ignorance and prejudice of the populace, and that your cause is hopeless; but, once out of Querétaro, and in Vera Cruz, where there are foreign men-of-war, the emperor can defy pursuit and pass the rest of his days in peace and quietness in Europe, and you with him."

Miramón listened gloomily.

"Then the best you can offer is a secret escape?"

"That is the best," was the reply, "but it ought to be quite enough for men whose lives are otherwise forfeited, as you have said."

Miramón uttered a heavy sigh.

"You may be right. Perhaps you are. At all events, it is fitting that his majesty should know of the offer. How is the escape to be made a possible thing, sir?"

"Simply that, if you accept the terms, I shall announce that his majesty has consented to surrender to-morrow, and that he has claimed a day to wait for succors that may come to him from Vera Cruz or Mexico. The truce will be respected, and to-night you can take horse and ride away to Vera Cruz, horses being arranged in the usual relays on the roads already. I believe I am right there?"

Miramón bowed.

"There is a regular post-road, and unless your men have interfered with it, it must still exist. There are horses in plenty all the way."

"Then if you will tell his majesty, the sooner we arrange for the surrender the better," said the staff officer.

Miramón agreeing with him, the general took his arm and conducted him from the church to a neighboring building in the same inclosure where they found the emperor, in the house which had been formerly occupied by the Father Superior of the convent to which the church was attached.

Maximilian of Austria excited the surprise and admiration of the envoy from Escobedo by the perfect calmness and composure which he exhibited in the interview.

One would have supposed that a man in his position in a besieged town, with the enemy in possession of the outworks, and the ultimate surrender of the place only a matter of a few hours, would have shown some marks of agitation; but the fair blonde face was as placid as ever, and the blue eyes shone with their usual light, as the emperor extended his hand to the staff officer of Escobedo, saying:

"Señor Coronel, you are welcome. I am glad that General Escobedo has done me the pleasure of selecting a man whom I like to perform the office that is necessary. You have come to announce that a surrender is inevitable."

"On the contrary, sire," replied Satani, "I have come to ask you to make your escape at once."

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE LAST OF A DYNASTY.

The emperor shook his head gravely.

"The scheme is inadmissible, sir," he said. "I came to Mexico by the invitation of its people, and I do not leave it unless they order me by an unmistakable popular vote."

Miramón stared at his master, and then at Satani, who said, in a tone of expostulation:

"But, your majesty, if you refuse to escape, what must be done?"

"That depends on what General Miramón has to say of the defense of this place," said the emperor, quietly.

Then, addressing Miramón directly, he continued:

"Tell me the truth, sir. Is this place defensible, and is it possible to repulse the besiegers at last?"

Miramón hesitated a moment, and then, as if making up his mind to face the worst, said abruptly:

"The church is invested, and there is no chance of prolonging the defense more than twelve hours."

"Exactly," said Maximilian, in the same calm tone in which he had spoken hitherto, without a trace of emotion. "The fate of the empire is settled, and to prolong the defense now would only be a sacrifice of lives which are not mine to give. The question is decided, and my resolution taken."

Then turning to Satani, he continued:

"If I surrender to General Escobedo, can he guarantee the lives of my men and their treatment as prisoners of war?"

Satani hesitated in his turn, and his voice had a sad ring in it, as he finally answered:

"I do not wish to deceive your majesty. The general will save the lives of the soldiers, but those of your majesty and General Miramón he cannot guarantee, on account of the hatred with which you are regarded by the Liberals, since the issuance of the manifesto of a year ago, under which several Liberal officers have been executed, for so-called brigandage."

For the first time in the interview the face of the emperor showed signs of agitation. His cheek flushed and his eye flashed, as he replied:

"And in what capacity, then, am I to be recognized, sir, if they refuse me that of a prisoner of war?"

Satani bit his lip as he replied:

"That is not for me to say, sire; but there is a party in the camp which is loud for your trial and condemnation by court-martial for violation of the laws of war."

The emperor flushed more deeply than before as he retorted:

"A court-martial must be composed of officers equal in rank to the accused, and where is there to be found in Mexico a court that would have jurisdiction to try me?"

"That is not for me to say, sire," was the tranquil reply; "but this I know that, unless your majesty takes the terms that are offered by General Escobedo, in secret, he can give nothing better in public. The indignation of the army will not be restrained."

"Then," said the emperor, firmly, "if the Mexicans are determined to behave like savages, instead of civilized people, I will put the full responsibility on them. Go back to General Escobedo, sir, and tell him that I am ready to surrender if he will guarantee the lives of the soldiers of my command."

"And what is to become of your majesty?" asked Satani, astonished.

Maximilian drew up his tall form to its full height.

"I throw myself on the people of Mexico, who invited me hither," he replied, proudly. "If they slay me, let them. I, at least, will not flee from the consequences of my own actions."

Then he signified, by a cold bow, that the interview was over, and Don Diablo Satani slowly left the church, and was conducted back to the gates, the formality of bandaging his eyes being abandoned as being now only a farce.

He returned to Escobedo and related what he had heard when the general actually seemed disappointed at the surrender, and said:

"I had hoped he would escape. It will be impossible to save him if once the soldiers see him in our power. We will wait till night, and renew the attempt. If we shoot him, we shall never hear the last of it from the foreign ambassadors. They will call us barbarians, and we shall be ostracized by the civilized world."

"Then why not guarantee the life of the emperor, and refuse to let any trial take place?" asked Satani, shortly.

Escobedo shook his head.

"You are a good officer, señor, and you know our people pretty well; but you do not know them sufficiently, yet. They will never give up the right of vengeance."

And the general, with a gloomy countenance, issued his orders for taking possession of the disputed inclosure of the church, much as if the triumph was on the other side.

The capitulation was carried out at once. Precisely at the stroke of noon the gates of the inclosure were thrown open, and the little Imperialist garrison marched out and stacked arms in presence of the Liberal army, after which the soldiers dispersed among their late enemies, greeting old friends, as if nothing had happened, and being unmolested on their part.

Then General Escobedo himself rode to the gate, followed by his staff, entering the church itself, and being met there by the emperor and his staff, who greeted him ceremoniously and tendered their swords, which were accepted in grim silence by the Mexicans.

It took an hour to make the transfer of troops, and then a buzz of excitement went through the Liberal army, as the captive emperor was seen to come forth, with General Escobedo, and proceed to the center of the encampment, to a large tent, over which waved the flag that showed that official business was to be transacted within its precincts.

There was great curiosity as to what transpired in the big tent, round which the sentries

from the American Regiment, which had been assigned the post of honor, paced to and fro, and refused to answer questions.

Officers in full uniform were seen to come in from various quarters of the camp, and enter the tent, after presenting some papers, to an officer, who appeared to have charge of the entrance.

The officers were all young men, and known to be ardent Liberals, but what business brought them there was a mystery which excited more and more curiosity, till the news spread that there was a "court-martial sitting, to try the usurper for his crimes."

The moment that piece of news went forth, there was great excitement and joy among the Mexicans, who rubbed their hands in glee at the idea of having revenge for all the trials that had been inflicted on their party, during the ascendancy of Maximilian.

At last, when the court had been in session about two hours, the doors were thrown open, and out came the officers in all their glory of full uniform and brilliant trappings, while a strong guard marched up, and carried off three figures, in the midst of them.

Davol, who was standing near the tent, whispered to Crocker:

"Which is the emperor, do you think?"

"The tall one, with the light beard," was the reply. "The dark one is Miramón, and the stout man is General Meja. I hear they are all to be shot, to-morrow, at dawn."

Crocker spoke in a low tone, with a gloomy air, and added:

"I hope they won't detail us to do the shooting, Davol."

Davol shrugged his shoulders, as he replied:

"Give the job to Brooke. He does not want to give up the command, and I would just as soon he should keep it for such a service as that. But they won't ask us. The Mexicans are wild to get the chance."

"Here comes Brooke," said the adjutant in a low tone, as the other spoke. "Something has happened; for he looks as if he was happy."

"Let him," growled Davol sulkily. "That Scott is getting better, and I suppose that's what makes him feel so good. I wonder if the scoundrel will ever get over it, Crocker?"

Before Crocker could answer, the colonel came up, saying briskly:

"Gentlemen, I am happy to assure you that the court-martial has taken the bold course, and that our regiment is detailed to execute the vengeance of the Republic of Mexico on the usurper."

Davol curled his lip:

"Not much boldness in shooting a prisoner, to my thinking," he said.

"But what is that to us? I suppose this ends the war, and we are to be disbanded."

Brooke shook his head with a triumphant smile.

"No such thing, gentlemen. I have just been asking as to that; and I am assured that the Mexican Republic will be only too glad to keep us in service, as long as we choose to stay; for there will always be need for our services. In the mean time, I have applied for the command of the firing-party that is to execute the vengeance of the law on the usurper."

"And I think that they will grant the petition," said Davol sourly. "I should not have asked the favor if I had been in your place."

Brooke shrugged his shoulders, saying:

"Every one to his taste. I shall never be ashamed to be identified with a solemn execution. Here comes the detail."

He pointed, as he spoke, to Captain Roblado, who came forward waving an envelope, which he handed to Brooke, who tore it open and read aloud as follows:

"Colonel George Brooke, of the American Regiment, in consideration of the valuable services rendered by his regiment, will report for orders at once. ESCOBEDO."

With a last glance of triumph, the colonel went toward Escobedo's tent, leaving the officers staring after him.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

AN UNEXPECTED ENCOUNTER.

WHEN George Brooke took his way to the tent of the Mexican commander-in-chief he looked as he felt, triumphant. The trials and tribulations that he had suffered since he had first encountered Doctor Satan were about to come to an end, for he had learned that his colleague, Gideon Scott, who had been so sorely wounded in the duel with the staff officer of Escobedo, was in a fair way to recovery and would very likely be able to sustain him in his denial of the charges that had been brought against him by the officers of his regiment founded on a newspaper-clipping that had been handed to them by some person or persons unknown, probably by the very man who had played so many parts since he had come to the Republic of Mexico.

Therefore it was a shock and surprise to the valiant colonel to find in the tent of the commander-in-chief when he entered it the very man he most feared in the person of Don Diablo Satani, who was standing by his general in company with another officer, whose green sash showed him to be of the medical staff.

Escobedo looked grave and severe, and as Brooke saluted and stood awaiting orders, he returned the salute with a slight movement of the hand and said shortly:

"Sit down, colonel; I wish to ask you some questions."

Brooke obeyed, and looked from one to the other with a countenance that showed marks of agitation as the general began:

"You are acquainted with a man called Gideon Scott?"

"I am, general."

"He is a Mormon?"

"I believe so, sir."

"Are you of the same faith?"

The question startled Brooke, who hastily answered:

"No, general. What could have put such an idea in your head?"

Escobedo frowned.

"That is not to the purpose. I ask questions, and do not answer them. You say you are not a Mormon?"

"No, general."

"Are you married or single?"

The question caused another start, and Brooke hesitated a moment before he answered fully:

"I am not sure."

Escobedo stared at him coldly.

"That is a singular answer. What does it mean?"

Brooke moistened his dry lips to answer:

"It means that I was married, some years ago; but my wife died at the altar—at least, I thought so at the time. Lately I have seen some one who—well, I am not sure if it be alive or dead. At one time I thought it a boy, at another a ghost. I—I cannot answer, general, but the man beside you can do so, if he has resolved to end all his juggling with me."

His eyes glared with an expression of bitter hatred at Satani, who paid no attention to him, while Escobedo continued:

"I am glad that you have told the truth to me. Do you know a man of the name of Charles Walden?"

Brooke hesitated a moment, and then, as if he had made up his mind to answer any and everything, replied:

"Yes, I do. I married his sister, Clara."

"Would you know him if you saw him again?"

Brooke looked round the tent slowly, as if expecting to see some one, and answered:

"I think I should; but he is not here now."

"He will come in good time, sir. Doctor Melanio, tell this gentleman what has been told you by the man under your charge."

Brooke turned toward the medical officer, who had hitherto not spoken, but who now said:

"The man, Gideon Scott, who promised well up to last night, had a bad turn this morning and is sinking rapidly. He is bleeding internally and we cannot stop it. He has made a statement which is here, general, sworn to before the judge-advocate of the court that has just concluded its session on the case of the usurper."

And he laid on the table a paper, in a large envelope, at the sight of which Brooke sensibly changed color, as he asked:

"It cannot be that the statement concerns me in any way, general. I have but the slightest acquaintance with this Scott."

Escobedo frowned.

"He claims to have known you for many years, and to have been your accomplice in crime, sir. He is in the last pangs of death, when he is likely to speak the truth, if ever, and he has sworn to all he has said. In the mean time, there is sufficient in his confession to warrant my putting you under arrest, and for that purpose, give up your sword at once."

Brooke started to his feet, flushing painfully, as he stammered:

"Under arrest, general? And for what crime? I have committed none in your service, and cannot be held accountable for—"

Here he stopped short, as the general lifted his thin forefinger, with a warning gesture, to say slowly:

"That is sufficient, sir. If you are wise you will give up your sword. It is an offense to our service to dispute the orders of the general of your army."

Brooke bit his lips and controlled his emotion with a great effort, while he took off his sword and handed it to the general, who waved it aside, and motioned Don Diablo to take it.

The humiliation, to Brooke, of giving up the weapon to one he hated as he did Satani, was bitter; but it was intensified as the staff officer said to him, in a tone which no one else heard:

"You refused surrender. It is too late now."

Then he took the sword and went to the door of the tent, where he made a silent signal which brought in a Mexican sergeant and four men, to whom he said:

"Take this officer at once. The general orders his close confinement in the crypt of the church."

The sergeant, a stout, thick-set, swarthy peon, from the plains of Chihuahua, nodded and took the colonel's arms, which he proceeded to join behind him with a rope, as coolly as if he

had been a notorious criminal. Brooke, stung at the insult, cried out, indignantly:

"General Escobedo, I protest against this. I am an officer, not yet condemned, and you are treating me as if I were a criminal under sentence of death."

Escobedo looked up from his table at which he was silently writing, and said in the smoothest voice in the world:

"You are what you are. I am responsible for my actions. Take him."

And seeing the uselessness of resistance, the colonel, lately so proud, was pinioned and led off through the midst of the soldiers in a manner that excited a general murmur of interest and surprise in the army, and in no place more than in the American Regiment.

Indeed, the men of that organization, seeing their colonel in bonds, began to murmur among themselves, and run to their stacks to get their arms, when their movements were checked by Davol and the rest of the officers, who seemed to be in the secret, and who managed to keep the men quiet till Brooke had been got out of sight.

Then the regiment was ordered under arms, and the habit of discipline kept them quiet, while a general order was read transferring the command of the regiment to Davol, "pending the trial by court-martial of Colonel George Brooke for conduct unbecoming an officer and a gentleman."

The reading of the order pacified the men, the more so that they all liked Davol, and had been cold toward their late colonel ever since the time when he had allowed the Mexican staff officer to take the lead of the regiment in the battle of the previous day.

Meantime Brooke was taken to the church, and down into the subterranean crypt or chapel, which is found under most Catholic churches, in memory of the times when the early Christians had been compelled to hide their religious ceremonies in the catacombs of Rome. The crypt of the Holy Cross was a gloomy place, lighted by a few lamps, and here Brooke was confined, with a sentry to watch over him, who answered all his questions with the provoking Spanish phrase "*Quien sabe*" (who knows), and utterly refused any information as to what he knew of the reason and result of the present dilemma of the lately proud colonel.

His anxiety and suspense increased as the hours went on, and still he was left, pinioned as he had been brought there, the sentry's step being the only noise that disturbed the silence, for the ceiling was of vaulted stone, supporting several feet of earth, and no sound short of a cannon shot could have been heard, down in the crypt, unless the doors were opened.

He had been sent there at dawn of day or soon after, and his only means of noting time was by the change of his sentry, who was relieved twice, from which he judged that he must have been there at least four hours.

Then at last, when the third sentry came on, he heard voices at the top of the steps leading down into the crypt, with the clash of sabers, scabbards, and down came several officers in full uniform, with their side-arms on, followed by a guard and some soldiers in undress uniform, carrying tables and chairs.

No one noticed Brooke, who had been placed in the remotest quarter of the crypt, and the demoralized officer saw that a court-martial was being formed, composed of officers from several Mexican regiments, with the major of his own men among them, and Crocker for the judge-advocate.

When the court was seated, the president said:

"Bring forward the prisoner, and let the articles be read."

Brooke was taken forward to the table, and his bonds loosed, when the judge-advocate stood up and began to read the charges on which he was to be tried.

Don Diablo Satani stood in the shade of a pillar close by, and Brooke met his eyes, with a glance of somber triumph, as he said in English, as if to himself:

"At last the time for justice has come."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE COURT-MARTIAL.

THE suspense under which Brooke had been laboring was chiefly as to what charges could be brought against him that would have any effect under the military law of Mexico, against which he was not conscious of having committed any offense.

This suspense was changed to apprehension when the first charge was read in the formal military style:

"CONDUCT UNBECOMING AN OFFICER AND A GENTLEMAN."

"Specification.—In this, that the said George Brooke, being a colonel in the service of the Republic of Mexico, did (on such a date) endeavor to use the forces of the republic for the furtherance of his private vengeance against Don Diablo Satani, otherwise the Señor Orazio Arnoldi, by ordering his men to fire on the said Arnoldi well knowing that the said Arnoldi was in no sense an enemy of the Republic of Mexico."

The time and place given showed that the attack on the camp of the Mad Magician near El Paso conducted by Cortina was meant, and Brooke looked apprehensively round the place to see if Cortina was present, his name being given as witness to the charge.

The second specification recited that:

"The said George Brooke, being an officer in the service, as aforesaid, did (on such a date) conspire with one Gideon Scott, also in the service of the republic, to assassinate the said Arnoldi, by a second attack on his camp."

And to this charge was attached:

"The written confession of the said Scott, as evidence for the republic."

The third charge was "disobedience of orders" in the night-attack on Queretaro, and the fourth that of "cowardice in action" in failing to lead his regiment. To this several witnesses, Mexicans and men of his own regiment, were named, and when the charges had been read, the culprit was asked "whether he pleaded guilty or not?"

By this time Brooke had recovered his equilibrium, and he at once answered:

"Not guilty to all of this stuff. I demand the privilege of counsel, and to be tried fairly."

The president of the court—a grizzled Mexican colonel—nodded his head to the request, saying:

"The court will permit counsel. Don Jaime Milleno has volunteered to act for you, if you wish. Do you accept him?"

Brooke brightened up at once, for the offer pleased him and he accepted it. The president gave some directions to an orderly, and the Irish officer was sent for and came to the crypt, where he seemed to be well acquainted with all present, and at once demanded that the trial proceed and the witnesses be subject to cross-examination.

The first witness called was "Juan Cortina," who came in in full uniform, looking innocent and mild, to testify that Brooke had "employed him, by virtue of his superior authority as an officer, to attack the camp of the Mad Magician, telling him that he could have all the plunder of the camp if he wished." His testimony was complete and established the fact of the attack and the previous orders, and the court looked sternly at the accused till Millen began to cross-examine the late brigand.

The Irish officer had the advantage of knowing Cortina well, and began at once by asking him some questions as to his way of life for the past few years, drawing out the fact that Cortina had served on both sides during the war and had been engaged in the plunder of more than one Liberal town. The ex-brigand winced under the questions, tried to bluster and evade direct answers, but Millen was inexorable, and ended by showing that Cortina had been a willing accomplice in the attack on the camp, and that he need not have obeyed Brooke's orders, had he not chosen so to do.

So Cortina stepped down, and the judge-advocate asked permission to read the confession of Gideon Scott, taken on his death-bed, that morning.

Millen instantly objected, "unless it was shown that the man had since died. If he were alive, he must be brought there, that he might be cross-examined, if necessary." The Irish officer made an excellent speech in support of his objection, and the president announced that the court sustained it, "unless the man Scott could be shown to have since died, in which case his confession would be read."

An orderly was sent for the medical officer in charge of the hospital, who sent word that "the man Scott had died since the sun rose," and Millen settled down into his seat with an air of disappointment, remarking in an undertone:

"Just as big a scoundrel as Cortina; but death makes all men respectable. I'll do the best I can for ye, Brooke; but things look squalidly now."

Then a hush came over the court, while Crocker took out the paper, which he had told them contained the confession of the dead Mormon, and began to read it aloud, in these words:

"I, Gideon Scott, being about to die, and desirous of making my peace with my Maker, as far as I can by confessing the crimes that I have committed, hereby swear that all I am about to say is the truth, in the presence of my Maker."

"I am a native of New York, where I resided in the month of July, 18—. During that time made the acquaintance of George Brooke, at a gambling house where we both resorted. I lost a large sum of money to him, which I was unable to pay, when Brooke offered to release me from the debt on condition that I should help him in a scheme which would make us both rich. The scheme was this:

"Brooke had a cousin, one Horace Arnold, who was the promised heir of his grandfather, Senator Arnold. This Horace Arnold was engaged to be married to a lady called Clara Walden, with whom Brooke was desperately enamored, and whose fortune was considerable. The senator was very fond of the young lady, who was his ward, and had set his heart on the marriage of Horace to her. Brooke proposed to me that he should secure from some doctors, who were willing to do any crime for a proper payment, a certificate that Horace Arnold

was an insane person, unfit to be at large, and that I should make an attempt to kidnap Horace Arnold on his wedding day, and have him confined in a lunatic asylum, while I should take a passage for myself the same day, under the name of Horace Arnold, together with a woman he had enticed into the plot, so that it should appear that Arnold had fled the country on his wedding day, with intent to insult the lady to whom he was engaged to be married.

"This plot was planned by Brooke, who provided all the necessary funds, and all I had to do was to secure the men and kidnap the person to be captured. This I succeeded in doing, and carried him off, though not without a desperate resistance, in which I had to stun Arnold with the blow of a cart rung. But he was carried off, and nothing was known of what had caused his disappearance, while I got a friend of my own to take the passage under the name of Horace Arnold to Europe, where he disappeared.

"I had resolved that I could not trust Brooke for my reward if I did not stay in the country, and proposed to hold the fear of discovery over his head as long as I could.

"The plot succeeded on his part, and he also succeeded in making the old senator believe that his grandson was a villain, and change his will, leaving his money to Brooke.

"The next step was to get Clara Walden to marry Brooke, and in this, too, he succeeded, by persuading her that she had been neglected by the man she loved, and that the only way to avoid humiliation, as a discarded bride, was to marry Brooke.

"This plot, however, did not succeed till the lapse of nearly a year, and when the wedding took place it was just on the eve of the breaking out of the late civil war.

"Unfortunately for the success of Brooke's villainy, Horace Arnold, as I afterward ascertained, managed to get one of the attendants at the asylum to convey a letter from him to Miss Walden, which reached her by a special messenger just at the moment when she was going from the church as the wife of George Brooke, and which took such an effect on her that she fell senseless on the floor of the church, and afterward died of disease of the heart.

"The fact of the letter, however, got into the papers, and George Brooke fled the city of New York, and went South, while I, in fear of a prosecution for my part of the plot, took a Western train and did not stop till I had crossed the plains and fetched up in California. There I remained for some time, till I went to Salt Lake City and joined the Mormons, and did not see George Brooke again till I met him a few days ago, in command of a regiment, and learned from him that Horace Arnold had come to Mexico, under the name of Doctor Satan, and was hunting for him, to revenge himself for the past.

"Since then I have, under his directions, made several attempts to kill Arnold, the last of which was a duel, in which I got the worst of it. Horace Arnold was never any madder than myself, and I humbly pray that I may be forgiven for all my sins against him. GIDEON SCOTT."

The reading of this confession was heard in silence, Brooke fidgeting, but not daring to interrupt; but as soon as it was finished Millen was on his feet, saying:

"I move that this be stricken out. It is irrelevant to the charge and we have nothing to do with what took place several years ago, in a foreign country."

Brooke eagerly nodded assent to the motion of his counsel, and the president looked puzzled, till Crocker rose and said:

"I am compelled to differ with my learned brother; but this is a dying statement, and must be taken as a whole. It shows that the accused, while in this service, through feelings of spite against a man he had injured in another country did hire Scott to kill him; and the rest of the confession shows the motive of his action. In a trial like this, the former character of the accused must be shown to be good or bad, and a man of such a character as this confession discloses him to be, is unfit to associate with officers and gentlemen. I demand the decision of the court, and the admission of this paper in full."

The president cleared his throat, and said solemnly:

"This is an important question. Clear the court for the deliberation at once. Secure the prisoner and take him out."

A couple of soldiers took Brooke and his counsel out of the crypt, and hurried them down a passage, while all the witnesses were excluded at the same time. An interval of nearly half an hour passed in suspense, when they were readmitted, and the decision of the court was pronounced as follows:

"The confession of the dead man, Scott, will be admitted in its entirety, and the trial will proceed."

Brooke sunk into his seat, haggard and worn, as he heard the decision of the president.

CHAPTER XXXV.

GUILTY.

FROM the moment the confession was ruled in order, the fate of Brooke seemed to be decided. Even Millen, who had kept a cheerful face up to that moment, looked gloomy, though he noted an exception and announced that he should appeal to General Escobedo on the subject. But in the mean time the trial proceeded, and the third charge, that of "cowardice in presence of the enemy" was taken up, and sup-

ported by a cloud of witnesses, who testified that the colonel of the American Regiment had failed to lead his regiment in action, and had permitted Don Diablo Satani to act as virtual colonel, leading every charge, and being always in advance.

Brooke made no fight on this subject, but Millen succeeded in showing that a colonel of infantry is not always expected to go in front of his men, and that on many occasions such a course would be wrong, as tending to prevent the men from firing, for fear of hurting their own officer.

The last charge, however, was the most serious of all, and when Davol was brought in, to testify to the open refusal of Brooke to lead his regiment to the support of the officer charged with the night attack on Queretaro, Millen did not attempt to cross-examine him, and announced, with a sigh, that he had "no questions to ask the witness."

The testimony being all in, the president announced that the prisoner's counsel might argue his case, and the Irish officer made a powerful plea for his client, on the ground that the prosecution was evidently the work of an enemy, who had not come forward as a witness, and that the real charge under which Brooke was being tried was for conduct committed five years before, and for which he could not justly be held to answer in Mexico.

Crocker, on the other hand, argued that "the purity of the service must be maintained, and that a man of the past life of Brooke was not fit to be retained in the service of the great Republic of Mexico, and should be driven forth, with disgrace, even if he escaped the punishment of death."

The arguments over, the court was cleared for the last time, and Brooke taken away to the dark passage, where he waited in suspense, along with his counsel, for near an hour, before he was summoned to meet his judges for the last time.

Then the judgment of the court was pronounced, that:

"They found the accused guilty of conduct unbecoming an officer and a gentleman, but acquitted him of cowardice in action, though not of disobedience of orders. Wherefore the sentence of the court was that the said George Brooke be publicly degraded from his rank in the army, and declared unfit to associate with officers and gentlemen forever."

The sentence was to be carried into effect, as far as regarded the public degradation, next day, at dawn, at the same time with the "execution of the usurper," after which the accused was to be sent to the frontier, as fast as possible.

No sooner was the sentence pronounced, that cut off the lately proud colonel from his fellows, than Brooke uttered a deep groan, as the soldiers advanced and replaced on his arms the bonds that had been loosed for the trial. Millen, with an air of constraint, said to him:

"I did the best I could for ye, Brooke, but ye killed yourself by what ye did before. I'll appeal to the general; but I tell ye frankly, it's no use. If I was general myself, I wouldn't alter the sentence, and that's plain talk."

And he left the place, following the court, and leaving Brooke in the crypt, with no one but the sentry.

How long he had been there, in a stupor of despair, he knew not; but he was roused by a voice close to him, and looking up, saw Horace Arnold, as he must now be called, standing beside him.

The sentry had been withdrawn, without the prisoner noticing it, and they were alone together.

Brooke looked up with a dreary scowl, saying:

"Why do you come to me now? You have triumphed. Is not that enough, or do you wish to exult over me further?"

"Neither," returned his cousin, gravely. "What I have done, I had to do to vindicate my own character against your schemes of the past; but I have not forgotten that ties of blood unite us yet, and I would not push you to the wall."

"I am there already," was the sullen reply.

"What more do you want of me now?"

"A free confession that your doom is just," returned the other, in the same grave tone.

Brooke laughed scornfully.

"That you will never get now. I am down as low as I can get. Besides that, you have left me nothing to gain now."

"You are wrong," said Horace, quietly. "I can save you from the public disgrace and show you a way to escape in safety."

Brooke started and looked at the other closely. Then he sunk back on his seat, saying sullenly:

"You are playing with me. You would not have followed me all these years, if you had meant to forgive me at last."

Then, as if some glimmer of hope had come to him, he went on:

"Well, tell us your fine scheme, and I'll tell you if I will do what you wish or not."

Horace watched him narrowly, and replied slowly:

"If you will write out a full confession of your guilt, and let the fact appear that I never was mad, and that you knew it, I will furnish you the means to escape, this very night, and you can be at Vera Cruz, on board an Austrian man-of-war, in two days."

Brooke looked up in surprise, asking:

"How can you do that?"

"Because I have obtained permission from Escobedo to send one officer, with the last will and testament of the captive emperor, to be conveyed to Europe, this night. You are no longer in the Mexican service; but you can accept this commission from the poor man who is to die to-morrow, and save your own life, while it will be reported that you have committed suicide, and the degradation will be pardoned you. That is the best I can do for you, in memory of the time when we played as boys together."

Having said this much, he added quietly:

"You can think over this. I will take off your bonds, give you the materials for writing, and leave you alone till night comes. When I return you can give me any answer you please."

So saying, he pointed to a table under a swinging lamp, spread with paper and writing materials, and loosened the bonds of the disgraced officer. Then, without another word, he left Brooke alone.

The clang of the door showed that he had locked him in; but Brooke, thinking escape still possible without conditions, rained all round his cell, trying to find a way to get out. It was all in vain. The walls were hard stone, and there was but one door at the top of the steps, down which Arnold had come. This door was of iron, and on the other side he could hear the measured tread of the sentinel, which cut off all hope of escape.

He paced up and down his narrow limits like a caged tiger, for an hour or more, and at last, with a sigh of hopeless desperation, sat down at the table.

His spirit was broken at last, and he began to write his confession in imitation of his late partner in crime.

Hour after hour he wrote on, covering sheet after sheet with close words, till the clang of the iron door roused him, and two soldiers entered the cell, preceding a lady closely veiled, at the sight of whose figure Brooke seemed strangely disturbed.

He rose from his seat, trembling violently, and tried to bow, but when the lady threw up her veil at last, he uttered a groan, as he exclaimed:

"Clara! Oh, my God! I thought that you were dead!"

The lady looked at him in a strange way, as she replied slowly:

"I might better be dead, than as I am now. Oh, George, what had I done to you that you should blast my whole life as you have?"

For the first time since the man had been in the toils, he cast down his eyes and looked ashamed of himself, as he muttered:

"I did not mean to do that. But I loved you so, that I could not help wishing you were mine."

She shook her head gloomily as she returned:

"Yours I shall never be, but neither can I be his. You are my husband under the law, and though I love the very ground he walks on, yet you know that I can never be his wife."

Brooke smiled for a moment, and then, as he met her glance, he lowered his eyes again, and muttered:

"What am I to do? I cannot undo what is done. I have written my confession, and there it is. Clara, would to God I could undo the past; but there is nothing I can do. I cannot untie the knot that binds us. Only the grave can do that. You do not wish the disgrace of a divorce—"

She shuddered slightly and waved her hand impatiently.

"No, no, not that, not that. That would be useless. I have to bear my burden, but you can make it lighter."

"How?" he asked, vaguely. "If I can, I will. I promise you that."

She pointed to the table, asking:

"Is that full and without reserve? I know you so well, George."

He colored deeply and went to the table. Then he sat down and began to write again, saying bitterly:

"Then you shall have it. No one else could have wrung it from me; but, by heavens, Clara, I do love you, and you shall see it."

Then he wrote rapidly for some time, and finally handed her the papers saying:

"Take it away, and if it is not full enough I will put in anything you say. Can I do more than that? Now leave me in peace."

She took the papers and was about to leave the cell when he said in a husky voice:

"Will you not say that you forgive me?"

The girl hesitated a moment, and then answered solemnly:

"I forgive you. Ask forgiveness of God, if you can."

Then she left the cell, and he heard the door clang to again, as he sunk down by the table, with his head on his hands.

CHAPTER XXXVI.
CONCLUSION.

THE dawn of day broke over the fair city of Queretaro, and the level rays of the early sun shone on the Hill of Bells, whence the battery of Millen had been withdrawn, while the vacant space was occupied by a square of troops, with fixed bayonets.

One side of the square had been left partially open, and here stood three men, in full uniform, ready to die.

The Emperor Maximilian, his tall form and blonde beard making him a conspicuous object among the dark-skinned Mexicans, was in the center, while Miramon and Mejia stood on either side of him.

All three were unbound and fully dressed, but unarmed.

A Mexican officer was reading a paper, which was the decision of the court-martial of the day before, and the emperor listened to the reading in silence, till the officer addressed him, and told him that "if he had anything to say to the troops, he would be permitted to do it, before the order to fire was given."

The emperor shook his head at first, but then seemed to alter his mind; for he drew himself to his full height, and turned round to the soldiers, who were bringing their pieces to a position to fire.

"Viva Mexico!" he said, in his deep, powerful tones. "Fire here!"

And he opened his breast to them.

The next minute came the rattle of a volley, and Maximilian of Mexico fell back, with his face to the sky, while Miramon and Mejia dropped on their faces, and lay still.

But not so the emperor. The volley had failed to kill him, and he writhed up, leaning on his elbow, the blood pouring from his breast as he struggled to sit up.

There was a groan of pity even from the stolid Mexicans, who had come to gloat over his death.

Then the officer in command turned away his head, and said in a husky sort of way:

"Finish him, sergeant, any way you please."

As the sergeant hesitated an officer ran out and went to the fallen emperor, whom he raised in his arms. It was the staff officer of Escobedo, who had led the American Regiment to the attack of the town, two days before.

As he raised the dying man in his arms, Maximilian opened his eyes and gazed up at the bright sky overhead, murmuring:

"Poor Carlotta!"

Then he fell back, and his face changed to the still whiteness of death; his last words being a feeling of pity for another.

So died Maximilian of Mexico, and the officer in command of the troops, as soon as he saw that the struggle was over, cleared his throat and shouted his orders again to march from the scene.

The soldiers wheeled off, and a small party advanced to the dead bodies, and took them away, after which there was a sort of pause, till General Escobedo was seen riding up the Hill of Bells, followed by a brilliant staff.

The soldiers of the camp, scenting something in the air, began to flock round the hill, and listened to the reading of an order, which announced the result of the court-martial on the colonel of the American Regiment, who was now to be "publicly degraded, in the presence of the whole army."

The order having been read, Escobedo gave some directions to one of his staff officers, who went off toward the Church of the Holy Cross, to procure the prisoner; but was soon seen riding back at full speed. As he rode up and threw his horse on its haunches by his commander, his face was pale and agitated, as he stammered:

"General, the man is dead. His body lies in the crypt, but he has blown out his brains."

The general seemed to be but little surprised at the news, for he only said quietly:

"So much the better, sir."

Then turning to his adjutant-general, he said to him:

"Make the usual order and announcement. It saves a good deal of scandal and trouble."

Then he rode away, and the news spread through the army like lightning that the colonel of the American Regiment had committed suicide to escape punishment, and the general verdict was one of pity for him and respect for the way in which he had escaped.

In the city of Mexico, a month or so later, the grand cathedral was all crowded with people and bedecked with flowers, to celebrate the marriage of Don Orazio Arnoldi, aide-de-camp to President Juarez and colonel of cavalry in the Mexican army, to a lady who was spoken of in the press of the city as "the widow of the late Colonel Brooke, formerly of C. S. A., and late of the American Regiment of the Army of Liberation."

The President of the Republic of Mexico and General Escobedo, who was now famous as "the victor of Queretaro," honored the nuptials with their presence, and the occasion was all that could be desired.

As the new-made couple came out of the

church the bridegroom, in English, said to the bride:

"The mills of the gods grind slowly, Clara, but justice is sure to come at last. Patience has wrought her perfect work."

Then they entered the carriage, which took them away to the suburb of Chapultepec, where they were to pass the honeymoon, and as the vehicle rolled off, the bride said softly:

"But it was all owing to you, dearest. Had you not had the courage of a lion and the skill of a wizard we should never have attained justice."

Horace Arnold smiled as he said to his wife:

"And yet, had it not been for Brooke's plot, I should never have been known as the Mad Magician. I never told you where I learned all my tricks yet. It was in the lunatic asylum, where the great wizard, Hermann, was confined at the time, he being really mad. He took a fancy to me and taught me all the tricks which I used with such success afterward on Brooke. I learned them to keep me from going really mad with vexation and anger at my detention, to occupy my mind while I was planning an escape; but, once out, they served me well and enabled me to shake the fortitude of Brooke in the very place where he was most accessible. They gained me my appointment with Escobedo, and I must say that the general kept my secret for me well. And best of all, they will enable me to give your brother an easy means of making a comfortable livelihood, now that we are provided for. From henceforth I drop the character of the Mad Magician. It has served me well, for it has gained me my wife and punished the villain who stole her from me."

THE END.

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